PENTHOUSE

SPRING 2019

INTERVIEW:
CONSPIRACY
THEORIST
DAVID ICKE

HOW ONE MAN
CONNED THE MAFIA
AND LIVED

NARCO-TOURS
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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Damien Costas

EDITOR
Sean Bruce

ART DIRECTOR
Gavin Morrison

VIDEO DIRECTOR
James Millynn

WRITERS
Ian Miles Cheong, Joseph Earp, Lucie Bee, Stephen Corby, Ben Pobjie, Helen Dale, Brendan O'Neill, Grace O'Neill, Amie Wee, Ian Lloyd Neubauer, Daisy Cousens, Seth Ferranti, Daniel Burt

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Carlene Raschke @studioflamingo, Michael Saunders, Ben Tsui, Joakim Karlsson, Thomas Agatz

ILLUSTRATIONS
Johannes Leak

CIRCULATION & PRODUCTION
Alistair Cook

ADVERTISING
Anessa Caputo

PUBLISHER
Penthouse Magazine
Tel: 1300 784 516
mail@penthouse.com.au

DISTRIBUTORS
Gordon & Gotch
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FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

By the time this magazine hits the stands Israel Folau may be old news, but the fallout from the all-star rugby player's dismissal will impact the way we talk about free speech well into the future.

Folau, in case you've been living under a rock, was sacked by Rugby Australia after posting on his Instagram an image that said, "Hell awaits… drunks, homosexuals, adulterers, liars, fornicators, thieves, atheists, and idolaters." Folau added also: "Those that are living in Sin will end up in Hell unless you repent. Jesus Christ loves you and is giving you time to turn away from your sin and come to him."

I don't agree with his words – being big fans of fornicators at *Penthouse*, my colleagues and I are among those Folau has condemned to hell – but I do believe Christians have a right to their beliefs. If we consider ourselves a tolerant society, they should also be free to express them without fear of persecution. A fact the left, in all its benevolence and endless tolerance, seems to have forgotten.

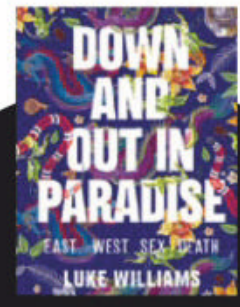
Folau saw overwhelming support for his fundraising campaign, despite attempts by GoFundMe to shut it down, not because every donor agreed with his sentiment – unlikely, considering how secular Australian society is – but because they agreed with his right to express it. While much of the mainstream media celebrated the destruction of a young man's career for his daring to express an opinion outside of the holy PC-orthodoxy, it seems many more disagreed, albeit, a little more quietly.

Free speech is something we firmly believe in at *Penthouse* – we always have. In the Report section of the magazine you're currently holding, we have some of the strongest free speech advocates to argue the case – not only for Folau – but for everyone. If we don't stand up to this nonsense now, the rest of us may face similar injustices for speaking our minds, and likewise find ourselves "cancelled" by the Woker-Than-Thou crowd.

As usual, the mag is filled with the best stories from around the world. Read up on the tactics of a famous Italian-American conman, venture through Medellín as we retrace the life and death of notorious cartel leader Pablo Escobar, or learn how going broke and slumming it in South East Asia was both the best and worst thing Luke Williams has ever done. And of course, the latest in tech, sports, music, film, gaming, alongside the world's most beautiful women.

Enjoy

DAMIEN COSTAS
Editor-In-Chief



BOOK GIVEAWAY

Check out our interview with Luke Williams on page 136. Like what you see? Well, we have 12 copies of *Down and Out in Paradise* to give away. Write to us at mail@penthouse.com.au with your name and address for a chance to win.

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PENTHOUSE

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SUMMER

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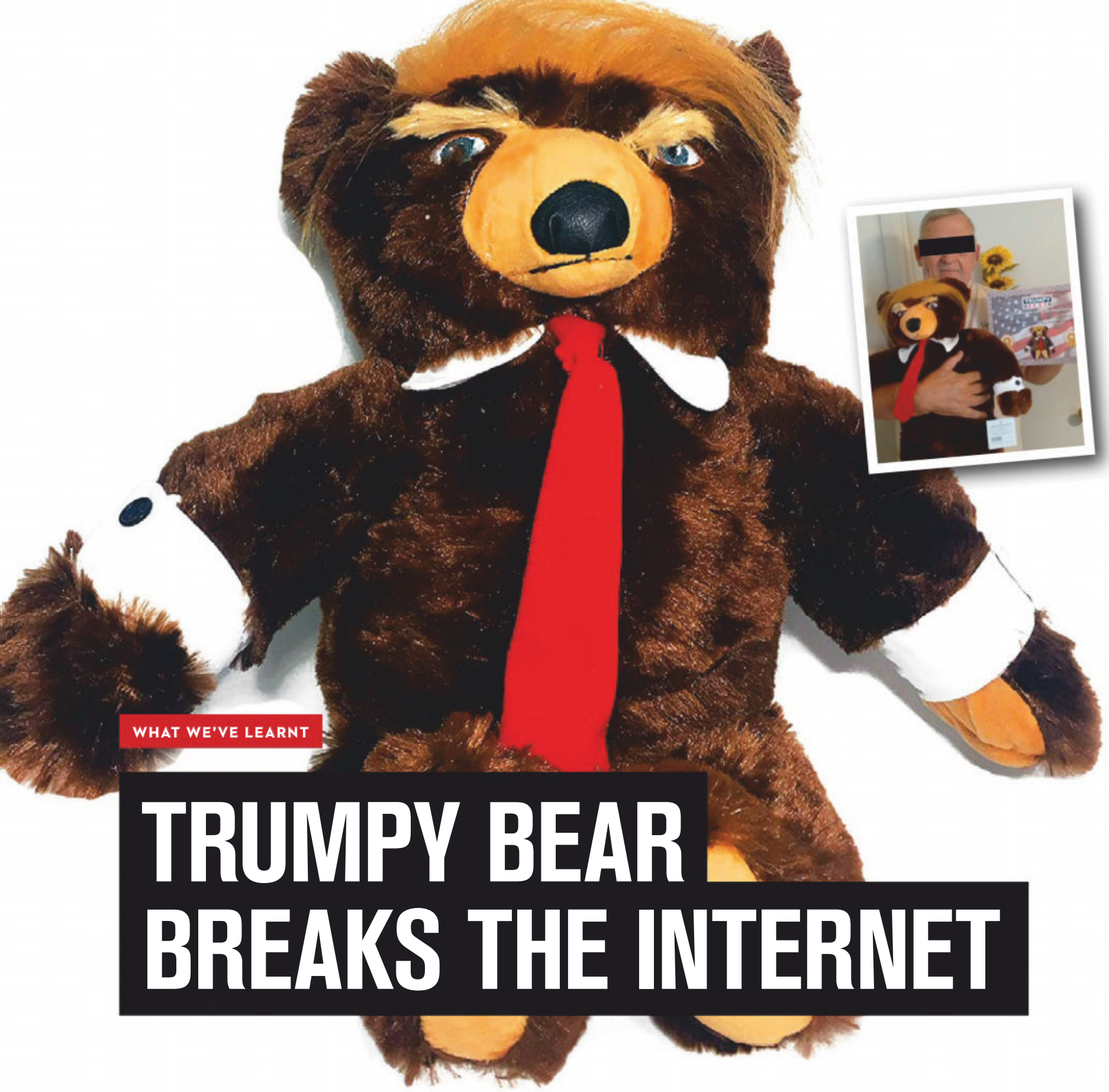
WHAT WE'VE LEARNT

MAKE TEDDY BEARS GREAT AGAIN!

THE TERRIFYING TRUMP TEDDY BEAR | CHINA'S NEWEST AI DEVELOPMENT | THIS MONTH'S BIGGEST CORPORATE FAILS



WHAT WE'VE LEARNT

TRUMPY BEAR BREAKS THE INTERNET

THE hottest toy of the year has hit the market – and just in time for Christmas. Trumpy Bear, the "fearless, super-plush American grizzly" sports a Trumpesque comb-over combined with signature red tie. And it is – in a highly competitive field – the most ridiculous thing we saw last year. "The wind whispered through the forest", begins the now famous ad that brought Trumpy Bear to the world's attention. "A storm is coming. You cannot defeat the storm". The over-the-top ad and sheer silliness of the toy raised a few eyebrows across the internet, leading many to conclude the bear is some kind of hoax. Myth-debunking website *snopes.com* contacted the retailers, Exceptional Products Inc., for comment

on the bizarre toy and received a few interesting answers to their enquiries.

First, according to *snopes.com*, it isn't a joke. Trumpy Bear is a real product that you can buy, and the ad is not a spoof (though, during some parts, we really were left wondering). The creator of the Trumpy Bear, the enigmatic VL Lange of Reel Vision, has so far remained mute, however, Exceptional Products did provide a "vision statement". "When President Donald Trump was elected to office as the first non-politician president," it read, "I felt it was time to name an American fearless grizzly bear after our new Commander in Chief."

Trumpy Bear's appeal is wide-ranging. In the ad, we see your standard salt of the Earth Americans: marines, veterans, nannas, soccer mums, motorbikers and golfers (a reference to the forty-fifth's fondness for the game, perhaps?). And while it's apparently not a joke and will likely appeal to the aforementioned kinds of Americans, we definitely see a big market of consumers who will buy it as a bit of a laugh or as a gag present for left-wing friends and family.

NOT THE REICH TIME NOR PLACE

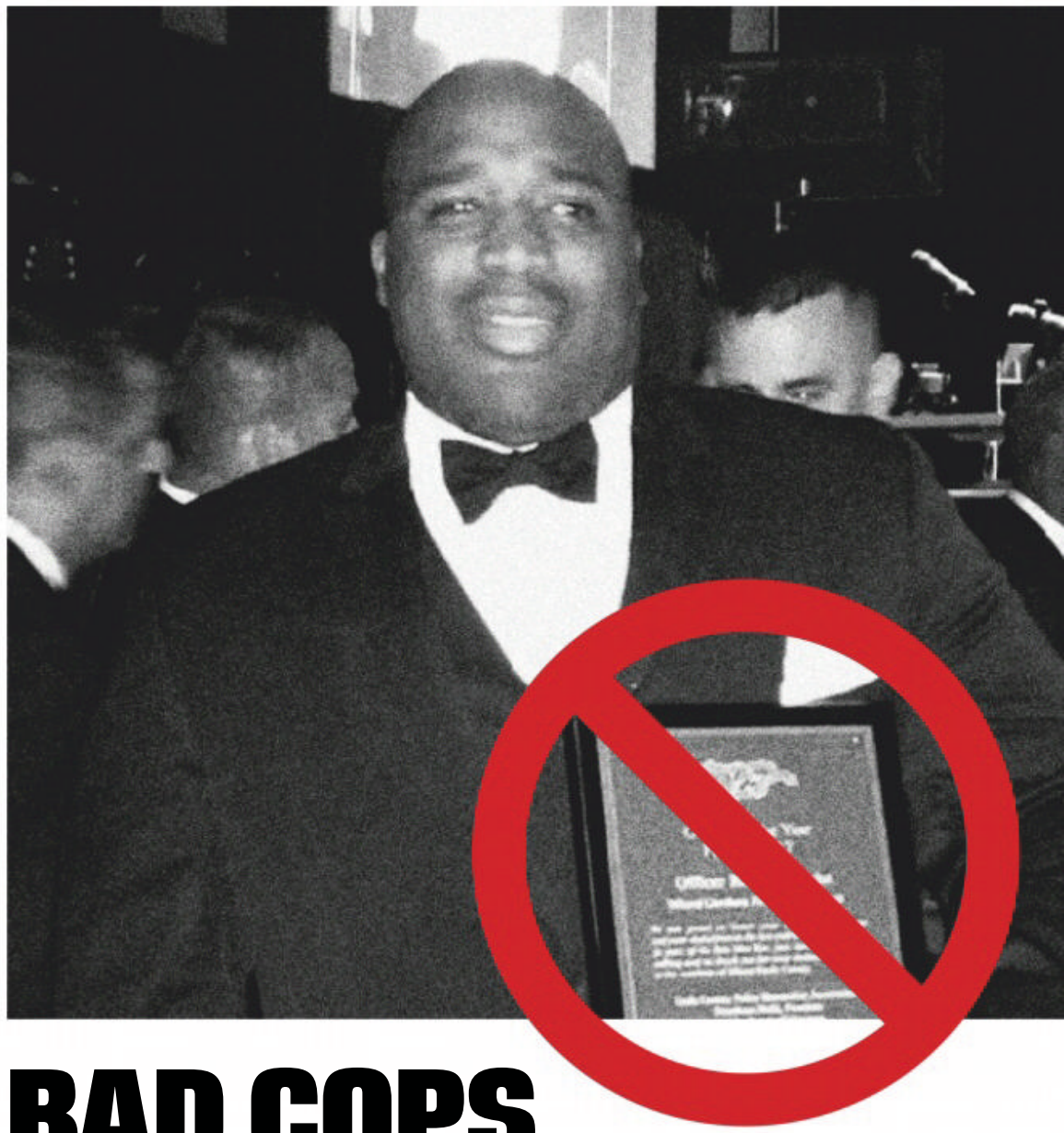
FELLOW trick or treaters in Owenburg, Ohio were none too happy to see a local area man dressed head to toe in full Nazi regalia along with his young son, sporting a brown shirt, red armband with swastika and little "Hitler mo'" at a local Halloween event. More surprising, though, was the guy's shock and frustration with the way his creative costumes were received.

Outraged, he took to Facebook, ranting about his ill-treatment at the hands of "the so-called 'Tolerant Left'".

"Tonight grown adults threatened a child over his costume. Threatened his mom and dad as well," Goldbach wrote. "Threatened to rip his outfit off of him screaming obscenities, scareing (sic) a small child."

Goldbach said he and his family "love history, and often dress the part of historical figures."

He's a dumbass, but the costumes were pretty good. Very accurate, and clearly constructed with lots of love and attention. As for the local reception of his handiwork – with such a keen eye for detail, we're surprised he did *Nazi* it coming.



BAD COPS

WHAT ya gonna do? – when a prison guard boils a mentally ill inmate alive by locking him in a scolding hot shower? You give him more power and admit him into the local area police force – where he will go on to commit a series of transgressions ranging from the hilariously incompetent to the grossly negligent. And then you nominate him for a local policing award. Seriously.

In 2012, as a prison guard in Miami Gardens, Roland Clarke locked inmate Darren Rainey in a shower cell with the water on and the temperature dangerously high. The prisoner, who was serving two years for cocaine possession, suffered from schizophrenia. It is believed that Clarke left him in the boiling hot shower for two hours as a form of punishment. When Clarke returned, Rainey was dead. He was found with second to third-degree burns on over 30 percent of his body.

Two years later and prison guard Clarke is now patrol officer Clarke. During his stint in the police force, Internal Affairs launched numerous investigations into his conduct. He was found having sex on the job, pursuing relationships

DURING HIS STINT ON THE POLICE FORCE, INTERNAL AFFAIRS LAUNCHED NUMEROUS INVESTIGATIONS INTO HIS CONDUCT.

with different women, losing evidence from a homicide case and crashing a patrol car into another driver after running a red light.

Despite all this, Clarke was a finalist for the Dade County Police Benevolent Association's Officer of the Year award in 2017. What ya gonna do?

GREECE TELLS FAT PEOPLE TO GET OFF THEIR ASSES

THE Greek government has banned obese tourists from riding donkeys after campaigners said the animals were being left with spinal injuries.

Donkey rides are a popular way of getting around for tourists on the famously stepped and hilly island of Santorini. Up until recently, the poor equines were forced to endure long working days, seven days a week without shelter, rest or water – and just to top it off, they'd get their spine readjusted daily by some fat-arsed Pommy tourist.

Campaigners drew attention to the problem, exposing the shoddy conditions the donkeys lived in and the spinal injuries they suffered as a result of overburdening. The Greek government introduced new legislation requiring clean food and water be provided to all working equines each day and requiring a load limit of 100 kilograms or one-fifth of the animal's body weight.

So lay off the quarterpounders and get back to the gym if you're planning a trip to the Greek islands. That's if you want to ride the donkeys and not make an ass of yourself.

PEANUT BUTTER IS NOT FOR THAT

A 22-YEAR-OLD Scotsman was found unconscious in his apartment, without testicles, soaked in blood, with peanut butter spread across his genital region.

The culprit? His own stupidity, really. And an old British Bulldog by the name of "Biggie".

After awakening from a coma, the young man revealed that he attempted to entice Biggie by smearing sandwich spread across his nethers. The dog gobbled it up and in the process, removed the ballsy young chap's sack permanently.

Maybe it was an act of revenge for neutering him? We'll never know – besides the fact dogs can't talk – poor old Biggie was put down.

Which is sad, because we really think the dog did us a favour – he allowed nature to take its course by ensuring his owner would never breed.

THE THICK BLUE LINE

AN oversized dildo has formed part of an explosive sexual harassment claim filed against the Mountainside police department in New Jersey.

"Big Blue" as the giant rubber phallus is affectionately called was repeatedly displayed in front of male and female officers, along with other incidents of alleged misconduct including using racial slurs, homophobic games and nudity.

The six plaintiffs – Officers Jeffrey Stinner, Christopher Feighner, Richard Latargia, Thomas Norton and James Urban, and part-time dispatcher Amy Colineri – are seeking compensatory and punitive damages, among other remedies.

The defence has asked that the case be dismissed on the grounds that the offending officers directed their behaviour equally to both men and women, supposedly making the claim of sexual harassment inaccurate.

"Taken as true for purposes of this motion only, the allegations establish that certain male officers were equally crude and vulgar to all employees, regardless of their sex," wrote the defence attorney.

The plaintiff's representation was not impressed, asserting that the defendants are "equal opportunity" offenders at best.

Superior Court Judge Camille M. Kenny denied the defence's motion to dismiss the case at the Union County courthouse in Elizabeth County in October.

WOMAN SUES HER EX FOR HAVING HUGE D★CK

SILINDILE Mangena, 29, from Harare in Zimbabwe is suing her ex-boyfriend because his “abnormally long penis stretched her vagina”, according to reports from *Metro UK*.

We can only imagine the defendent’s response: *Guilty, your honour. I now present to the court, exhibit D.*

Mangena claims that over the course of their relationship, 37-year-old Mugove Kurima’s huge package stretched her vagina so much she now requires reconstructive surgery.

The 29-year-old said no man can literally fill the gap her ex left.

The surgery will cost 150,000 Rand or around $AU14,000. Mangena is asking the court to force her former lover to pay the hefty fee.

It’s uncertain exactly how sizeable the man’s downstairs department is; however, the female claimant asserts her private parts were “tight” before she met her ex in 2016.

This is no “small claim” – if he doesn’t intend on paying, we imagine Mangena’s hoping for a hung jury.

CHINA INVENTS CREEPY A.I. NEWS ANCHOR

IN TODAY’S *Notes from the Impending Apocalypse,* we go to China to see another job for which humans need not apply.

China’s state-run news agency Xinhua has created two digital “composite anchors” that use artificial intelligence, combined with images and voices of real news anchors, to create a broadcaster that doesn’t sleep, won’t ask for more money and can never question the endless torrents of CCP propaganda it spews forth into lounge rooms across the People’s Republic, 24-hours a day, seven days a week.

We never expected news anchors to be replaced this quickly, but just like cashiers at McDonald’s and Amazon factory floor workers, the future has come knocking, and it’s as terrifying as we suspected.

The virtual anchor can teach itself from watching live broadcasting videos and “can read texts as naturally as a professional news anchor.” While the development is both terrifying and impressive in equal measure, the last part isn’t totally true – the AI anchor still sounds a bit like Microsoft Sam, with a speech impediment.

THE VIRTUAL ANCHOR CAN TEACH ITSELF FROM WATCHING LIVE BROADCASTING VIDEOS

VODAFONE'S NEW VOXI AD LOOKS LIKE A "FIELD OF C**KS"

THIS latest corporate fail is brought to you courtesy of Vodafone's latest ad for Voxi, the telecommunication giant's new sub-network in the UK for people under 30.

The offending ad features detached "thumbs" in a field, hopping towards the new network's logo, which is hovering ominously in the air, chanting out the brand's major selling points. While we're sure they were trying to make a cool ad that resonates with its younger target audience, what they did instead looks unmistakably like a field of dicks.

It's tough when you're trying to market a brand as being hip and social media savvy, only to fail miserably and get savaged over social media for your attempt. But that's exactly what happened.

One user Thomas Hobbs captured the zeitgeist quite well: "I'm sure Vodafone set out to make a snappy advert – all about thumbs and phone use – for its Voxi brand. Somehow the reality is a field full of cocks."

Sam added: "I know they're supposed to be thumbs on that @VOXI_UK advert, but some look like mini knobs."

Voxi responded to the requests for confirmation to the question – are they thumbs or willies? – from the brand account, replying: "They're definitely thumbs!"

It might be time to go back to the drawing board if you have to reassure people that your ad isn't selling a field of dicks. But hey, that's just us.

TOOTH AND JUSTICE

A four-year-old child brought home crack cocaine to her parents after a mix-up at a daycare centre. Serenity Straker thought the capsules she found lying around at the childcare centre were "teeth" and told her mum she had put one in her mouth.

Either someone's lost their stash, or the tooth fairy has been drinking again.

"She could have died if she ingested this," Straker told WPIX. "I was furious."

The incensed mother immediately reported the incident to the police, who confirmed the substance was crack cocaine. She then brought Serenity to the hospital where she tested positive for the drug as she had briefly put the capsule in her mouth before spitting it out.

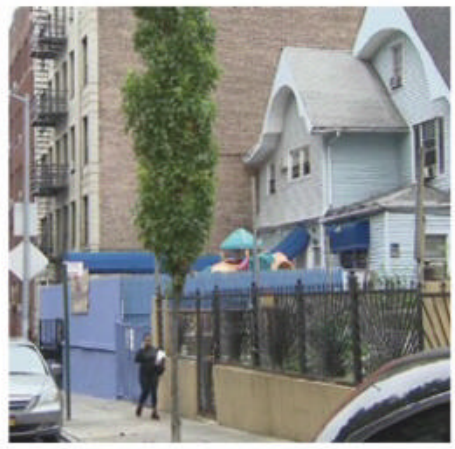
Yvette Joseph, who runs the Little Inventors Day Care, told WPIX that someone must have thrown the drugs over the fence and then a child found it.

"We checked our centre thoroughly and all of the children are safe," Joseph told WPIX.

Straker is not satisfied.

"No one was watching the children," she said. "There are 15 kids in the room with two teachers and two aides, where were they when this was going on?"

Police are investigating the incident.



UNSEEN. UNDIVIDED. UNSTOPPABLE.

FROM DIRECTOR ELIZABETH BANKS

CHARLIE'S ANGELS

STORY BY EVAN SPILIOTOPOULOS AND DAVID AUBURN

SCREENPLAY BY ELIZABETH BANKS

COMING SOON

DIRECTED BY ELIZABETH BANKS

#CHARLIESANGELS

COLUMBIA PICTURES

LAWNMOWER VERSUS CHAINSAW, WHO WILL WIN?

A 72-year-old man from Tennessee attacked his son with a chainsaw but was stopped when the son defended himself by riding over the older man with a lawnmower.

The father, identified as Douglas Ferguson, is facing a charge of attempted second-degree murder.

By the sound of it, the lawnmower in question was no rinky-dink, hand-operated Victa setup. The wounds caused by the incident were so severe doctors were forced to amputate the 72-year-old's leg. The man couldn't be served a court attendance notice for a few days while he recovered.

Obviously, this is not a joke – people got hurt and somebody could've been killed. But still, there's something wildly comedic about two small-town Southern country folk, a father and his son, going at each other with power tools in fits of rage. Investigators said the two had a long-running feud, over what is anyone's guess.

WHOA DUDE, THAT'S METHED UP

METH is a dangerous drug that can make people do some very strange things. Like call the cops on invisible intruders, getting *yourself* busted and blaming the whole thing on ghosts.

The Ouachita Parish Sheriff's Office says they responded after getting a call from a man who said he had been attacked with an axe.

When the police arrived on the scene they found the caller, Michael L. Auttenberry, deranged and out of his mind, swearing at people who were "obviously not there." The deputies handcuffed him after he began hurling abuse in their direction, they also noticed that he didn't have any notable wounds of the sort that he had reported.

According to arrest records, Auttenberry told the deputies there were intruders in his house. You can probably see where this is going. There were no intruders in the house, but there was a bag of crystal methamphetamine sitting in plain view on the man's nightstand. Auttenberry was found with a gram of the drug in his possession, which he claimed was planted there by "ghosts".

Unsurprisingly his excuse didn't fly, and police arrested the man for possession of a controlled substance and giving a false police report.

TOPLESS WOMAN RIPS RIVAL'S PANTIES OFF IN FIGHT

A BRUTAL street fight between two leggy Brazilian women in Rio De Janeiro has gone viral after it was caught on camera.

The footage shows a woman wearing white pants pummelling another woman wearing a black dress into a barrier, before jumping on top of her and brutally punching her several times in the face.

During the commotion, the woman in white loses her top. Her sudden exposure doesn't deter the feisty Latina lass, though. She continues to rain down punches on her opponent,

taking the fight onto the roadside and then into the gutter.

Surrounded by jeering onlookers, white pants grabs black dress by the hair and violently smashes her face into the bitumen. Then, in a final act of catfight ferocity, white pants snatches black dresses underwear and rips them off her body before storming off, topless, into the night.

How did it all start? What did black dress do to deserve such white-hot hatred? What did white pants do about her toplessness? Folks, these are the questions that keep us up at night.

I LOVE C**CKS CLUB!

FOR another example of a corporate fail this month we look to British airliner Thomas Cook Airlines, who have managed to outdo Cathay Pacific with their own livery fuck up.

New designs on the side of the planes read: "I Love Cooks Club", except when the emergency exit door is open, when due to an overlap between the "O" and "K", it reads: "I Love Cocks Club".

Cook's Club is the British airline's new millennial-focused hotel brand offering "zen vibes" and "amazing cocktails", according to its official web page.

Thomas Cook told *Sun Online Travel*: "It goes without saying it's an accident, but it is one way to highlight where the emergency exit is."

This comes just a few weeks after airline Cathay Pacific had a similar nightmare with a paint job.

The Hong Kong-based carrier's Boeing 777-367 read "Cathay Paciic" with the word "Pacific" spelt wrong along its length, a mistake picked up by travellers at the Hong Kong International Airport.

The company joked on Twitter: "Oops this special livery won't last long! She's going back to the shop!"

Some people aren't so convinced that Cathay Pacific's paint job was a mistake.

An engineer for Haeco, a sister company of the airline, told the *South China Morning Post*: "The spacing is too on-point for a mishap.

"There should be a blank gap in between letters if it was a real mistake, I think."

It's a weird PR exercise, but as they say: There's no such thing as bad publicity.

GET THE PICTURE

Evander Holyfield vs. Mike Tyson II, billed as “The Sound and the Fury” and afterwards infamously referred to as “The Bite Fight”, was a professional boxing match contested on June 28, 1997 for the WBA Heavyweight Championship. It achieved notoriety as one of the most bizarre fights in boxing history, after Tyson bit off part of Holyfield’s ear. Tyson was disqualified from the match and lost his boxing license, though it was later reinstated.

HOT SHOT

JESSICA ROCHE

@jessicajroche

We're bigger fans of booty-building than bodybuilding here at the *Penthouse* office, which is why the incredible Jessica Roche is our Health Issue crush. The Gold Coast local's workout routines involve everything from boxing to resistance training and cardio, totalling up to five to six days a week in the gym. We speak for everyone when we say the hard work has definitely paid off.

Photographer: Carlene Raschke @studioflamingo

DOWNLOAD

HEALTH FACTS MEN NEED TO KNOW

MENTAL WELLNESS

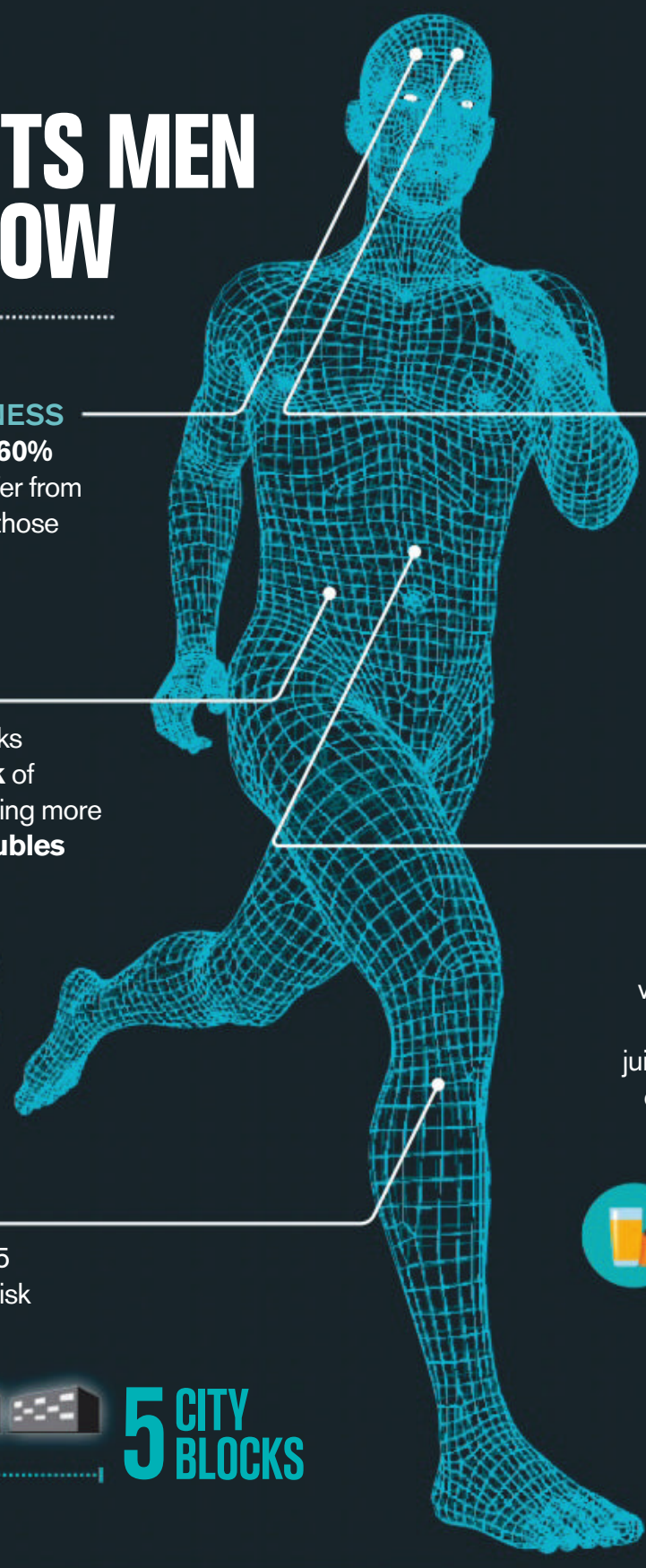
Inactive men are **60%** more likely to suffer from depression than those who are active.

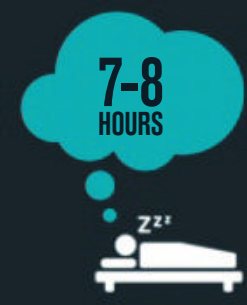
DRINKING

Those who consume 4 to 10 drinks a week at most have a **lower risk** of developing type 2 diabetes. Drinking more than 10 drinks a week almost **doubles your risk** of type 2 diabetes.

ACTIVITY

Men who climb 50 stairs or walk 5 city blocks a day may lower their risk of heart attack by **25%**



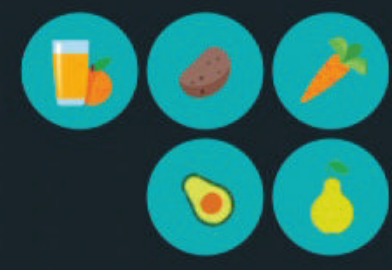


SLEEP

Men who sleep 7 to 8 hours a night have about **60%** less risk of fatal heart attack than those who sleep 5 hours or less.

NUTRITION

How easy is this! Getting your 5 to 7 servings of fruit and vegetables is as simple as a glass of orange juice, one potato, a large carrot, half an avocado and a pear.



MEN'S HEALTH: BY THE NUMBERS

I

Globally, men live on average **4.4 years** less than women

4.4

II

The top 3 reasons for reduced lifespan in men are **cardiovascular disease**, **suicide**, and **motor vehicle accidents**.

III

Globally, Alcohol kills almost **6 times** more men than women.

IV

Only **30%** of a man's overall health is determined by his genetics. **70%** is controllable through lifestyle.

V

On average, the last **11 years** of a male's lifespan will be in poor health

SOURCE: MENS HEALTH FOUNDATION

MAN OF THE MOMENT

FISHER

BY SEAN BRUCE

I ASK FISHER's manager, the coincidentally named Brett Fischer, what his client's main pull is. How has a kid, whose well-known Instagram antics and carefree sense of humour made him a comedic king in the surf scene in the 2010s, gone and become one of Australia's most respected musical exports?

But the answer is in the question. That's just it. He's carefree. He's cool. He doesn't take himself too seriously. And people fucking love it.

"He's relatable. Kids feel like they know him or know someone like him in their group of friends and that makes you let your guard down a bit," Fischer tells me. "Plus, he's not trying to be too cool, and when you go and watch him play, you can see that. He's having more fun than everyone else, and I feel that resonates with the crowd to create a unique vibe at the shows."

Since he got off the pro-circuit and went full time into DJing and production (a decision he only half-jokingly tells me was inspired by his surf sponsors dropping him), his personal brand has grown as the tech and house scene explodes into different markets across the world.

Particularly, in America, where FISHER (real name Paul Fisher) has spent the past 11 years of his life, he tells me he's seen the reception to his genre of music become increasingly positive.

Or in his words: "From people saying, 'what is this dog shit?' to 'fucking *giddy up!*'"

FISHER's list of achievements gets longer each year. A residency in Ibiza, a spot at Coachella, an ARIA nomination, a Grammy nomination, the creation of his own events brand and label, Catch & Release, his bass-belting track "Losing It" not only reaching the heights of multiple worldwide Dance and EDM charts but coming in number two in Triple J's Hottest 100 last year. Not to mention the recognition that comes with having your track finding its way onto the playlists of some of the biggest names in the biz; guys like Skrillex, Guetta and Tiësto.

"I CAN'T WAIT TO GET BACK THERE AND TEAR THE JOINT DOWN! LOVE PLAYING AT HOME TO A BUNCH OF LEGENDS GOING LOONY!"

If any of this is getting to his head, he doesn't show it. Even when he tells me his favourite place to party is his own night in Ibiza ("It's called BODYWORKS with my boys Solardo and CamelPhat, and it fucking PUMPS, so get your ass there!"), it doesn't seem arrogant. It genuinely comes across as Fish just being Fish, loving life.

So, what can we expect from FISHER come the next few months, or even years, I ask?

"We aren't looking at what's going to be going on in a year," says manager Fischer.

"We are actively planning for years three, four and five right now. Making Catch & Release a world-renowned brand and label. And continuing to push the envelope on playing in markets that most people in his genre skip out on building a hard ticket selling act."

I ask if we'll be seeing him back Down Under anytime soon. FISHER tells me it's already in the pipeline.

"All I can say is it's gonna be BIG!" he tells me. And, again, his excitement is infectious.

"I can't wait to get back there and tear the joint down! Love playing at home to a bunch of legends going LOONY!"

Tour dates haven't been officially announced, but in the meantime, we're keeping our eyes peeled and following the Fish.

For hilarious antics and more info on upcoming shows and tours, you can follow FISHER on Instagram @followthefishtv

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FILM

AT THE SOURCE OF THE PROBLEM

ADAPTATIONS are a thorny business. It's a juggling act between appealing to a preexisting fanbase while creating an original identity for itself to court a broader audience – and risk failing to appeal to anyone. Why license a franchise if you're unable to give people what they want?

To many, Henry Cavill didn't seem right for the role of the series' protagonist, Geralt. He just wasn't old enough. He looked too "clean". He was too much of a pretty face to play the rugged main character. His personal enthusiasm for the role and his passion for the video games mattered little to anyone who called themselves a fan – to anyone with any interest in watching *The Witcher.*

Doug Cockle, the voice actor behind Geralt in the video games, had already established Geralt's personality. His appearance in the games, as depicted by its Polish creators at CD Projekt RED, made Cavill seem an odd choice. Fans wanted someone who looked and sounded the part in the role. Mads Mikkelson came to mind, and Cavill – a great actor in his own right – bears no resemblance to either Mikkelson or the Witcher of the video games.

Further reports that the casting of one of the series' main characters, Ciri, was potentially going to an actress who did not resemble her video game counterpart even in ethnicity soured many to the show's creation. Naturally, cultural commentators were quick to unleash claims that their complaints and concerns were driven by some form of bigotry – it was a narrative that drove a deep wedge between *The Witcher*'s fans and the show itself. Credit to Lauren Hissrich, *The Witcher*'s showrunner, for putting an end to the rumours and addressing the fanbase with empathy and understanding.

The same can't be said of all showrunners who fight the same battles. When *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* was met with apprehension from the decades-old fanbase, its director, Rian Johnson, accused critics of entitlement and even misogyny. A narrative driven by both Johnson and cultural commentators who seized upon the popularity of the *Star Wars* franchise to promote their political views was to accuse its original fans of being cultural dinosaurs who hated the movie's woke overtones. Ignored were criticisms about everything else wrong with the film and its treatment of the original trilogy's protagonist, Luke Skywalker.

"I almost had to think of Luke as another character. Maybe he's Jake Skywalker – he's not my Luke Skywalker," said actor Mark Hamill in a pre-release interview, who later regretted voicing his "doubts and insecurities" about Johnson's direction of the role that made him famous.

Hamill wasn't wrong, and he didn't need to apologise. He was voicing the same concerns that everyone familiar with Luke Skywalker raised about Johnson's decision to turn *The Last Jedi* into a subversion of everything *Star Wars* fans wanted and expected from the film. There's an argument to be made about subverting expectations – but it shouldn't potentially collapse the entire franchise.

It was an expensive gamble and one that hasn't paid off for Lucasfilm with the failure of the *Han Solo* standalone film at the box office – the series' first financial loss. The idea that a *Star Wars* movie could even perform badly was unimaginable years ago before Johnson's success in alienating the core audience. As it stands, the new trilogy fails to appeal to its base, and it isn't doing a good job distracting the younger crowd away from *Fortnite* and *The Avengers*. Only time will tell if J.J. Abrams manages to steer *Star Wars* back on course with Episode 9.

It's worth noting that as a video game series, *The Witcher* is itself an adaptation of fantasy novels by Andrej Sapkowski. The only difference then was that most of the non-Polish speaking world had no idea what they were getting into. There is enough originality in the games to render the source irrelevant. Even though the Netflix series, like the games, is based on the novels, Hissrich and her team must deal with catering to the only group of people in the world even interested in watching the show, whose interest in *The Witcher* is the only reason it exists.

MUSIC

MARILYN MANSON AND THE FIB OF THE MISSING RIB

BY JOSEPH EARP

I REMEMBER exactly who told me the Marilyn Manson dick-sucking story for the first time. He was this rangy ginger kid named Jason Mawes who sucked at sport and was perpetually in the process of knocking out his teeth. I don't know how he had that many to lose – every other day he'd trip over, or walk into a tree, and come running to the teacher on the playground with a cupped handful of his own molars.

"You know Marilyn Manson?" he asked me one day.

"No," I said.

"You know he got his ribs taken out so he could suck his own dick?"

"No," I said. And I didn't. But that sentence stuck with me for the rest of the day. It was fascinating to me. It was like this rare glimpse into the world of adults – into their desires and the strange things they did to maintain them. I'd never heard anything like it.

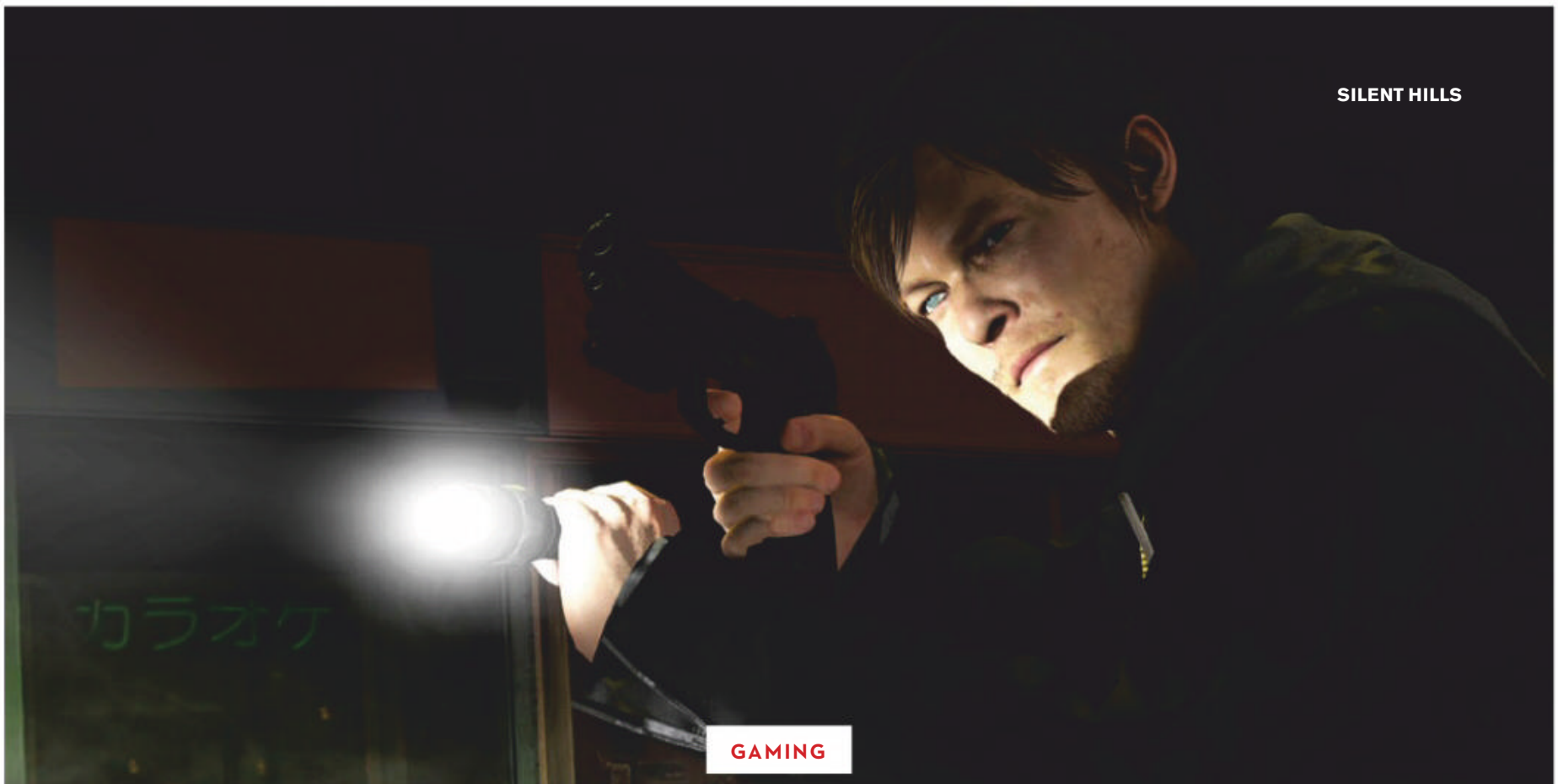
If you were born in the early '90s, you probably have a similar story. Maybe you remember the name of the kid who told you, too. After all, the Manson dick-sucking rumour has surpassed even the critical longevity of Manson himself, who released his first album 25 years ago this year. For people of a certain generation, the guy's a rib remover first and a singer second.

Of course, it's total rubbish. Manson's denied the rumour – as he would. But according to doctors, such a procedure wouldn't even help the process of auto-fellatio. It's not clear how the story started, or on what continent, or why some trickster decided Manson was the musician to peg it to in the first place.

But even if it's a lie, it's a lie that I've started to feel nostalgic for. These days, our world is one endless cycle of harmful misinformation. Everyone's reading someone else's bullshit; circulating deliberate digital lies or sloppy bits of journalism that align with a view they've decided is true before they've even logged on.

The Manson story comes from a different time – and is a different kind of lie. It wasn't dreamt up to get clicks, or to convince us of a secret, sprawling conspiracy, or to change the way we vote. It's just a harmless fiction; a verbal game, designed to get children on playground giggling. At worst, it confuses kids about the function of ribs. That's it.

We may never see a lie like that again.



SILENT HILLS

GAMING

DO VIDEO GAMES GO TO HEAVEN?

BY IAN MILES CHEONG

WHAT happens to games when they die? As more and more video games are designed as online-only experiences – or "services," as publishers call them – many of these titles fall by the wayside, unable to compete against the big boys. Juggernauts like *Call of Duty* and *League of Legends* put their imitators to shame.

Most are dead on arrival. Sensing a trend, developers rush in to claim a piece of the pie with no consideration to why anyone would pick their game over something more popular. Even with major financial backing, they seldom claim ground. The millions playing *World of Warcraft* or *Hearthstone* aren't going to abandon the countless hours they've already sunk into their addiction for an alternative drug, no matter how tempting.

The last decade saw numerous contenders to *World of Warcraft* attempt, to no avail. Not having learned from the mistakes of their predecessors, this generation of games sees countless imitators of *Call of Duty*, *League of Legends*, and more recently, *Fortnite* – kings of their respective genres. Inevitably, these titles flop like a fish out of water the instant they're released. With a few dying gasps of air, their services are terminated, leaving the wallets of their customers lighter (some significantly) and without a damn thing to show for it.

Radical Heights, *LawBreakers*, *The Culling 2*, *Evolve*, and *Dirty Bomb* are just a few games that died this year. The full list could fill up a phone directory.

So, what happens to the products that cost countless sleepless nights to produce? For the most part, they stay dead. The assets, rendered useless, collect dust on old hard drives until fans decide to do something about it.

Silent Hills is one example. Developed by Japanese video game legend Hideo Kojima, *Silent Hills* had all the hype and fanfare to be one of the decade's most celebrated horror games. Its publisher, Konami, released a proof-of-concept called *P.T.* (or "playable teaser") to the excitement of PlayStation 4 owners. However, the company had a falling out with its creator and cancelled it to focus on its Japanese casino business, pulling the demo from the online store.

All trace of it was scrubbed from the platform – there's no way to download it anymore. Enterprising fans who kept copies of the game on old console systems extracted the game's data are now trying to recreate P.T. by stitching together what files they have in a simulacrum of the game on the PC, but the original experience is gone for good.

In the best-case scenario, publishers acquire the rights and give the old games a fresh coat of paint. THQ Nordic has been releasing remastered versions of defunct games under their stewardship in anticipation of reviving old, but not forgotten franchises like *Darksiders* and *Titan Quest*. The company's even planning something with *Kingdoms of Amalur*, but it needs permission from EA to do anything with it, leaving the enterprise in limbo – as is often the case with old franchises.

InXile, the makers of *Wasteland 3* and *The Bard's Tale IV*, re-released their library of classics for current systems to reward their customers with nostalgia, and to promote their new offerings. They aren't remastered, but they don't need to be. There's even a platform called Good Old Games, or GOG, that caters to gamers wishing to rekindle their childhoods.

But for the most part, games like *LawBreakers* and *Radical Heights* will never again see the light of day, with the only signs of their existence remaining on old "most anticipated games of [year 20XX]" YouTube videos – grave markers, and reminders for future game developers. Sadly, these lessons are never learned – even by those who've been around and should obviously know better.

NEW ZEALAND WANTS YOUR IPHONE PASSWORD

BY LUCIE BEE

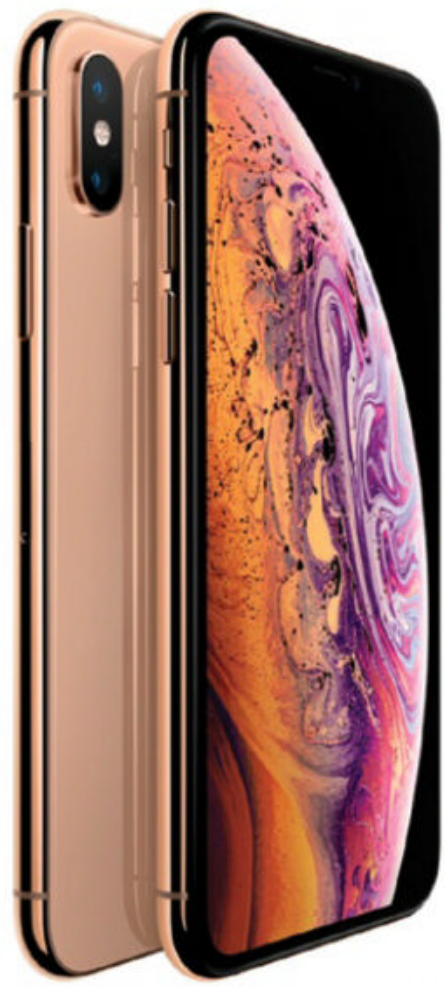
WHEN I question whether I've always made the best choices career wise, travel is usually the first thing that comes up. Being a sex worker means that come countries just don't want me to pop by for a visit, primarily because my job means I'm intensely morally compromised.

That's half a joke.

Once you're in the sex industry, it becomes really difficult for people to view you outside of the industry. Sex work literally trumps anything else there is to know about you. So, if I go through customs somewhere and I'm honest, it's highly likely I'll be detained, questioned and in some places, not granted entry. My job is flexible. This a huge asset. But it's also a major liability, because the fact that I could conceivably work anywhere, often means people assume I *will* work anywhere.

If you're thinking "Hey, if you have a day job, just don't mention you're a sex worker". In some places, sure, this might work. But with tightening security all over the world, that's not necessarily something you can put money on. Recently, New Zealand, with the introduction of the *Customs and Excise Act 2018*, became the first country close to home to introduce penalties – including fines and prosecution – for not handing over the passwords to your electronic devices when trying to enter the country. In theory, border officials all over the world have always been able to "politely" request access to your devices, but you've also always been able to refuse without any penalty – beyond potentially not entering the country, that is. NZ is changing the game by effectively saying "Hey, let us invade your privacy – you're free to say no, but we're gonna charge you for exercising your basic human rights."

In order to do this, customs officials have to have "reasonable cause" to feel they need to look at your stuff. But there's not a huge amount of clarity in regard to what "reasonable" means. They also don't have to prove this before they take your device and



there's no way to appeal it. The rules around this seem to imply that they're only allowed to look for files that have been saved on your phone, but excuse me for being a little sceptical. With most people's data saved externally, in the cloud or using other file storage programs, what exactly is the point? Someone with criminal intent can still slip through the cracks here – but at least border patrol gets to take a "reasonable" gander at people's nudes, under the guise of "national security". If it's deemed necessary, data can be kept for a "full search", manually, or with the assistance of a "technical aid", with data being copied for further evaluation. Don't worry though! They'll have to delete it after the search. Promise.

If this doesn't alarm you – it absolutely should. Beside the fact that it's a total invasion of privacy, it also raises big questions regarding how data should be handled, and if we necessarily trust the government to ensure that's done correctly. It damned well terrifies me. I can't visit places like the United States. Tightening laws regarding border security mean that they can ask me anything (questions ranging from reasonable to downright degrading), look at every device I own, potentially detain me for hours, then ban me for 10 years and that's if I don't run afoul of that pesky facial recognition software. I mean, I desperately want to go to Comic-Con, but it's just not worth it.

This year I visited NZ for a games conference I was to speak at. No problems getting in! My plan wasn't to work there, but let's say someone had recognised me, or just noticed that I was a relatively well-dressed woman travelling alone (this actually happens, female travellers have been mistaken for sex workers purely because of presentation). Would they have considered that reasonable cause to ask for my phone? What if they spotted some of my photos? A copy of my schedule from back home? A screen shot of an advertisement? Anything that any reasonable person, who runs their own business and has a smart phone, might also have saved. Would I have still been allowed in to the country?

I have literally no way of knowing.

The times when sex work is most validated is usually when sex workers are being penalised or discriminated against. I think one of the most radical things I can do as an activist is to be as visible as possible. But that comes with risks and it would be a lie to say that it hasn't required changing a lot of plans. Different corners of the world are now being closed off to me, which impacts not only my ability to take a break, but also any work I do outside the industry. I believe that border security is important and respect that each country has the right to set the rules regarding how they go about that, but it seems like these laws are using the guise of "safety" to exercise unnecessary levels of control over and access to individuals. It's started with minorities, but who and what is next?

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SPORT

CRICKET WAS THE LOSER ON THE DAY

BY STEPHEN CORBY

SURE, it's true that the idea of England winning the cricket World Cup, or any world cup, even one filled with cold tea, fills me with bitter bile and makes me swear like a shearer with a snake in his shorts.

But I could have coped with it, I really could, if they'd actually won the 2019 edition, which was, quite frankly, a kind of coitus interruptus for Australian fans, who've become used to each World Cup being a hugely enjoyable festival of us beating everyone (we've won it five times, and since 1999, we've raised that funny-looking cup four times).

Yet the simple fact is that England, or at least the bunch of citizens of the world who turned up wearing blue shirts, did not win the World Cup this year; they stole it, plain and simple.

Honestly, perhaps the most upsetting and unfamiliar emotion I felt during the whole thing came with the recognition that I felt absolutely gutted for a bunch of Kiwis (and even more so for Gerard Stokes, the father of the Kiwi with tribal Maori tattoos who found himself at the pointy end of said robbery, Ben 'Punchy' Stokes).

Without fail, all of my English friends are calling the Final the greatest game of all time, and crowing about how exciting it was but, as they are about countless things, they are wrong.

The greatest World Cup game of all time remains the 1999 World Cup final, in which South Africa spectacularly showed off what the Great Steve Waugh referred to as "mental disintegration". Chasing a small total, they fell apart at the sight of the round mound of rhetoric that was Shane Warne, and threw the game away, only for Lance Klusener, a man with tree trunks for legs and just as much thickness to his head, to just about win it for them.

He was, famously, undone by the overly keen backing up of bowler Alan Donald, we ran them out, tied the game and celebrated like the bloody champions we are. (Yes, the game before that against South Africa, which I was lucky enough to be at, and which was saved by Steve Waugh's batting, as well as featuring his greatest brickbat: 'you just dropped the World Cup', has its claims for equal greatest, it was a hell of a year.)

The similarity with the Cup Final this time is that it ended in a draw, only in this case that somehow happened twice, and the Kiwis were cruelly robbed on a count back of boundaries. What makes it unbelievably cruel, and into such a Pyrrhic victory for the Poms, is that they'd already been blighted with woeful luck when a run out went wrong, the throw bounced off Stokes's bat and went to the boundary, with England given six runs as a result, instead of the five the umpires later admitted they should have gotten.

Which means that, if there were any justice in the world at all, the plucky New Zealanders would have won by one run, which seems like a far fairer reflection of how the game went.

Yes, it would have been sweeter and cleaner if Trent Boult had taken a hat trick in the Super Over, but life is rarely that joyous. Or not since Warne, Waugh and Glenn McGrath retired.

No, England winning the World Cup was not a joyous moment for a country that has become, in so many ways, an utter laughing stock, with a clown in charge for good measure, it was a crime against cricket.

POLITICS

THE PROBLEM WITH "R U OK DAY"

BY BEN POBJIE

MY LEAST favourite day of the year is R U OK Day. Of course it's supposed to be a day that offers comfort and support to a depression sufferer like me. It doesn't work that way at all. What it does is, first, offer a huge, glaring reminder of my illness and the fact that I'm abnormal; second, lets me know that mental health is, like church on Christmas, a one-day-a-year kind of deal; and third, provide resounding proof that people will only express concern for my welfare when prompted by a national advertising campaign. I spend every R U OK Day depressed, crushed under the weight of my disorder. Anyone who asks me "R U OK?" that day might as well punch me in the stomach.

But the really aggravating thing about R U OK Day is that it's just another way for the Australian government to dodge the responsibility it has to its citizens.

The mental health system in Australia is a nightmare. With a mental health care plan, you get 10 subsidised sessions with a therapist per year. If, by chance, you have one of those pesky mental illnesses that persists beyond 10 weeks, well, time for you to shell out. And those sessions are subsidised, not paid for – if you can't find a bulk billing therapist, you're going to have to pay what could be a pretty big gap. I had to discontinue visits with my last psychologist before I'd even had my 10 sessions because I couldn't afford it.

Of course, the payment question is all but moot if you can't even find a mental health practitioner: many patients are forced into long waits before an appointment becomes available because there aren't enough therapists to meet demand. In an emergency, obviously, you can head to the hospital, where that already-overburdened system will groan a little more under the increasing pressure, and if you're lucky you might get a bed, of which there aren't enough.

So, what I'm saying is, mental health is horribly neglected by our government, and people with mental health issues are placed under enormous stress by the system's failures. If you're relatively affluent, you might manage to muddle through. If you're poor – and mental illness and poverty frequently go together for obvious reasons – you're pretty much screwed.

Luckily, governments have found a clever way to avoid being held accountable for this failure, and R U OK Day is the greatest achievement in their strategy. See, as long as the public can be made to believe that the answer to a mental health crisis is "starting a conversation", "ending the stigma", or "checking up on your buddies", any responsibility for actually helping people get the treatment they need evaporates. That's why politicians are always so eager to promote initiatives like R U OK Day, to stand in front of Beyond Blue banners and tweet "raising awareness" – because awareness is nice and cheap and makes everyone feel like they've done something wonderful without actually having to do anything at all. Essentially, the government is just that friend who, once a year, pops by to say, "by the way, are you OK?" and goes merrily on their way for the next 364 days, smugly content in their performance of their compassionate duties.

Well, guess what: at a time when thousands of people are being driven to despair by their inability to access the assistance they need; when suicide rates, particularly among young males, are sky-high with no sign of improvement and the chances of practical help being offered to us seem slim to none; at this time, we need people to do more than just be aware of the problem or occasionally ask if we're OK.

THE REALLY AGGRAVATING THING ABOUT R U OK DAY IS THAT IT'S JUST ANOTHER WAY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT TO DODGE THE RESPONSIBILITY IT HAS TO ITS CITIZENS.

That's why, whenever a "campaign" comes along, trying to tell us that the problem with mental health is the stigma and people's unwillingness to talk openly about it, I'd love it if we collectively said no. Refuse to buy into the authorities' cash-saving awareness measures and demand something actually be *done*. Mental illness sufferers don't need to be asked if they're OK: they need to be supported in their fight to *be* OK. They don't need awareness. They need action.

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INTERVIEW

KING OF CONSPIRACY

DAVID ICKE BROUGHT THE IDEA THAT A SECRET CABAL OF LIZARD PEOPLE ARE RULING THE WORLD TO A MAINSTREAM AUDIENCE. HE'S BEEN RIDICULED, REVERED AND MORE RECENTLY – BANNED FROM ENTERING AUSTRALIA.
INTERVIEW BY SEAN BRUCE

DAVID Icke has a pleasant East Midlands accent, and – I don't confirm this – but it sounds as if he's sucking on a throat lozenge. It's something I've noticed listening to him speak on YouTube as well. It doesn't surprise me that his voice might be sore. Icke can talk. His sell-out show in Wembley went for 10 hours. His planned (now cancelled) shows in Australia were billed at four. It's only natural that even the fiercest fighter of the interdimensional alien menace gets a sore throat sometimes.

For the uninitiated, Icke is perhaps best known as the guy who believes the world is run in secret by a cabal of shapeshifting reptilians. If you're a bit older you might remember him as the ex-British footballer who went on the Terry Wogan show claiming he was the son of God. More recently, he was banned from entering Australia for promoting anti-Semitic ideas.

How Icke went from defending goals in the English Football League to warning humanity about the threat evil aliens posed to our world is as strange and interesting as his theories themselves. After going from professional footballer to journalist and sports broadcaster, Icke became increasingly interested in environmental issues affecting his local community in the Isle of Wight. It is during this period, he comes to suspect the opposing Labour and Tory parties are not working for the people they supposedly represent but rather are colluding in the Freemason's Lodge, where the "real decisions" are made.

For Icke, this is the beginning of a deep-seated distrust of authority.

To combat this corruption, he starts his own regional branch of the then relatively unknown Green Party. Just six weeks after he joins, due to his public profile and media training, Icke is elected as the Party's national spokesperson. In the 1989 summer election, the little-known party is thrust into the national spotlight after attracting an unprecedented level of support in the European elections. Suddenly, after not even having been a member for a year, Icke is representing the Party on the national stage.

It's around this time he starts sensing a supernatural force around him.

"From about early 1989, if I was in a room alone, it was like there was somebody else there, and this progress through the Green Party at breakneck speed and this other thing were moving together."

He tells me he kept this to himself at first, remarking that he thought it was "just one of those things".

The presence draws him, through what Icke calls an electromagnetic field, to a small shop, where it instructs him to look at the books. Here he finds the work of Betty Shine, a famous British Clairvoyant and spirit healer.

Searching for an explanation, he seeks her out. Shine tells him he is destined to "reveal great secrets" and – as he would infamously repeat on the Terry Wogan show later on – that he is the "son of God".

I ask Icke if he still experiences supernatural entities. "Well, it's a completely different form now," he replies, dismissing my question. He sounds annoyed that I'd even ask.

Similarly, when I bring up his most famous theory – when I mention "the reptile in the room" – I can sense he is becoming defensive.

He acknowledges, from an everyday view, the theory that the world is secretly run by bloodsucking, reptile-human hybrids is "bizarre", but he adds that after 30 years of investigating he

has come to the conclusion that the world isn't just a little bit different to how we perceive, but in fact "it's absolutely nothing like we think it is."

What follows is a sprawling dissertation on the nature of reality, including Einstein quotes, commentary about indoctrination in society, quantum physics and a personal theory he calls the "postage stamp consensus", all of which he says justifies his belief in shapeshifting aliens.

"When you get to that level that reality is not what we are experiencing or appear to be experiencing," he tells me, "then what the hell is strange about the fact that this world might be manipulated by a force that doesn't take a human form?"

I admit, it's no more out there than most religions.

In the past Icke has identified famous individuals and world leaders whom he suspects may be reptiles, included among them are Tony Blair, the British Royal Family and the Bush family. I ask him to identify some more current examples, suggesting some of our own leaders, like Tony Abbott (who must be a candidate for certain) and Scott Morrison (hard to know, but good idea to find out).

Icke immediately goes on the defensive.

"No, I'll not go down the road of Icke says so and so's a reptile. Just not doing it okay?"

I'm disappointed.

He continues, "I've been here for 30 years, I've been questioned for 30 years, I know where things lead. So and so is a reptile, Icke says, oh god, isn't that amazing and what an idiot. Okay, I'm not going there."

I try to calm him down but he tells me he knows what the headlines will look like.

"I know in the days when it was all about Icke thinks he's the son of God and all that stuff, if ever I put my arms out to make a point about the length of something, that's the picture that would appear in the paper, as if I'm nailed to the fucking cross."

He's clearly agitated, so I move on. If he doesn't want to specifically name a politician, I ask can he identify some of the covert power structures that help maintain the reptile rule here in Australia.

His answer is as sprawling as ever. He describes "secret societies" and "semi-secret groups" that impose their will in each country, comparing them to McDonald's franchises.

He tells me he has seen the same programs rolled out in different countries over the world. "Not only is it a global pattern unfolding before your eyes, it's the global pattern that was in my books in the 1990s," he says.

Soon, as is typical when speaking with David Icke, our discussion meanders again, and we're talking about the accusations of anti-Semitism that have dogged him over the years and recently lost him his visa to Australia.

The primary charge is that Icke encourages Holocaust denialism and perpetuates myths about Zionism and Jewish world control.

"If I expose the Italian mafia, is that a statement about Italian people?" he asks.

"Because I'll tell you what, this is what sickens me, turns my stomach, is the way that Jewish people as a whole are mercilessly exploited with what I would describe as a protection racket that stops any criticism or questioning of any Jewish person whatsoever."

In particular, he refers to George Soros, Hungarian/American investor and philanthropist, a subject of many right-wing conspiracy theories. Soros is Jewish. Icke argues that he is labelled as an anti-Semite because he criticises and exposes powerful "Zionists" or "ultra-Zionists" who use accusations of anti-Semitism to defend themselves against "legitimate investigation".

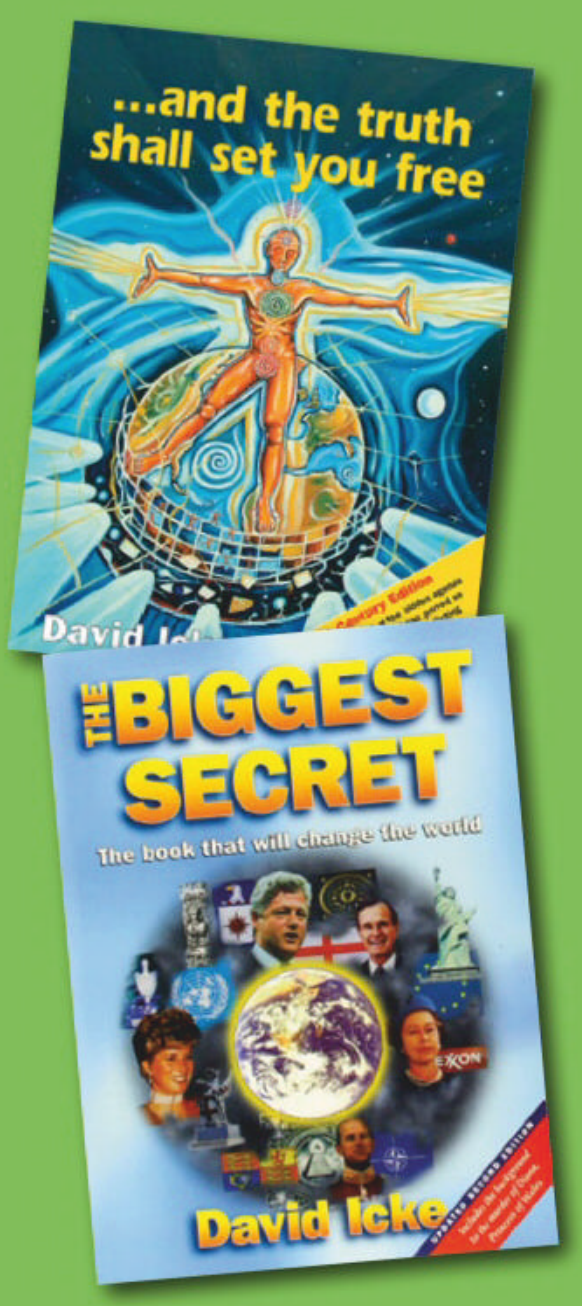
I'm not convinced. I ask Icke about his Holocaust denial and reproduction of the well-known anti-Semitic forgery, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

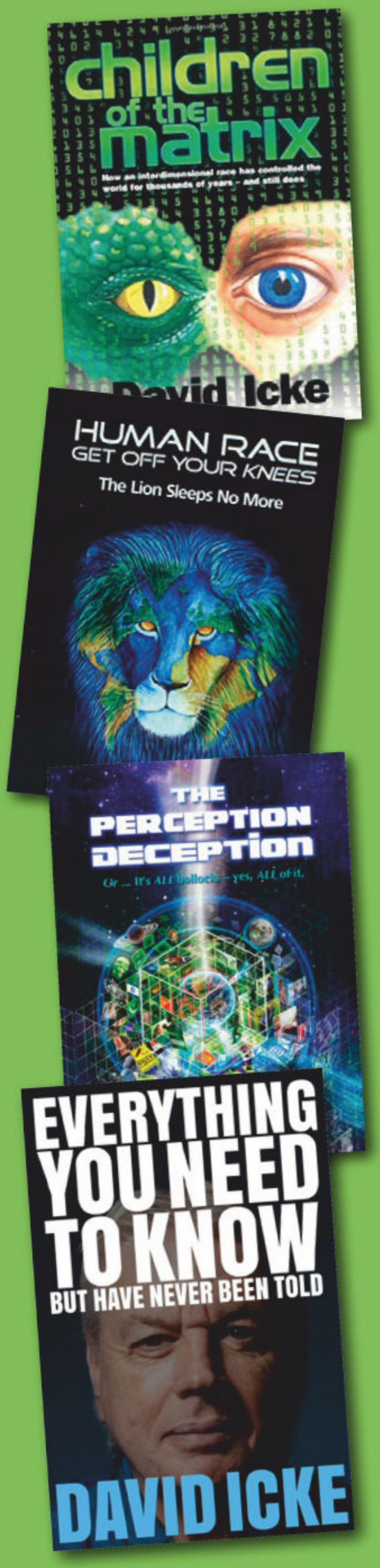
His response is signature Icke. "Well, first of all, don't believe what you read in the papers."

"I came across an article in which a Labor politician who must have donated his brain to medical science in Australia, saying that I was campaigning for Holocaust denial to be taught in schools. That is such an unbelievable lie, it's staggering."

"This is what I've said, and I'll say it again… If we're going to claim to live in a free society, then someone else must have the right to say, 'Well, I'm not sure I believe that,' without actually being put

ICKE ARGUES THAT HE IS LABELLED AS AN ANTI-SEMITE BECAUSE HE CRITICISES AND EXPOSES POWERFUL "ZIONISTS" OR "ULTRA-ZIONISTS" WHO USE ACCUSATIONS OF ANTI-SEMITISM TO DEFEND THEMSELVES AGAINST "LEGITIMATE INVESTIGATION"




children of the matrix
How an interdimensional race has controlled the world for thousands of years – and still does
David Icke
HUMAN RACE
GET OFF YOUR KNEES
The Lion Sleeps No More
THE PERCEPTION DECEPTION
Or ... It's ALL bollocks – yes, ALL of it.
EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW
BUT HAVE NEVER BEEN TOLD
DAVID ICKE

in jail as people are in Germany."

I point out how continually questioning the Holocaust and repeating myths of international Jewish control are traditionally the kinds of ideas put forward by actual anti-Semites to encourage distrust of Jewish people.

"If you look at my books, 90 percent of the people I name are not Jewish," he replies.

"When I'm naming a stream of Americans… I'm naming a stream of British people or French people or German people, there is not a problem. But if I name some people who happen to be Jewish, like Soros, suddenly there's a problem.

"For me, we should be looking at evidence and be racially and culturally blind to the people involved, because if we don't do that, what are we? We're racist.

"I'm being completely misrepresented, utterly and completely misrepresented, but so what? I've been misrepresented for 30 years. I think I can live with a bit more."

For the record, I don't think Icke is an anti-Semite. His conspiratorial outlook takes topics like the holocaust or Zionism and naturally looks for alternative narratives. What is evident is this often results in him repeating ultra-right or anti-Semitic talking points and perpetuating myths about Jewish people. He isn't anti-Semitic, but it doesn't surprise me that anti-Semites like him. To accuse him of actual racism, though, would be to ignore the fact he believes the world is consumed by a struggle between human beings and ancient, trans-dimensional reptiles. That isn't a metaphor in Icke's eyes, either. The ultimate evil isn't the Jews or any other race – it's actual bloodsucking aliens.

Our conversation takes another interesting turn when we get onto the topic of identity politics and contemporary leftist activism.

He argues that the modern left has been funded into existence by none other than George Soros and is actively attempting to undermine people's cultural and political freedoms under the banner of political correctness.

"Instead of looking at people as individuals and judging people by their individual behaviour, irrespective of race, background, colour, creed, income bracket, it's being demanded that we judge everyone as a group and not as an individual. What this is, is Marxism under another guise."

I ask Icke what Marxism, a theory of class struggle and resource redistribution, has to do with political correctness and self-identity.

"First of all, Karl Marx was a banker's man," he replies. "The basic technique of Marxism was transforming society by conflict."

"The modern version of Marxism, which you might call progressive Marxism, is replacing the class struggle with self-identity struggle. It's still defining groups and bringing them into conflict, and transforming society as a result."

The idea that there are "reds under the bed" is a common theme among the conspiratorial critics of the modern left. Cultural Marxism or as Icke puts it "progressive Marxism" alludes to sinister left-wingers engaged in a decades-long communist plot to undermine western culture.

Icke suggests that at the helm of this Marxist movement are massive corporations and the wealthy elite, who engage in mass censorship of individuals with whom they don't agree.

"The traditional, genuine liberal left would have railed against that, but not the progressive left, because it's been hijacked. It's been bought and it's been perceptually programmed," he says.

"What I've seen, and this is very important, is that the liberal left that I knew and grew up with has been completely overturned and hijacked by a mentality called progressive, which came out of America, which is sweeping over the world."

Icke tells me he's all for fighting discrimination, which he calls "child-like" but that the left goes too far in challenging concepts of gender, particularly, in "encouraging people to question their gender who weren't questioning it before." Pointing to the explosion of young people in Britain who are questioning their gender, some of whom will undergo reassignment.

"If people come to the conclusion that they feel they're in the wrong body, then they should be given every support in coming to terms with that and living their life on that basis," says Icke. "But that is very different from being externally

encouraged to question it when you weren't questioning it before."

"I tell you, talk to people who've gone through transgender transition and decided they wish they hadn't, talk to them about how difficult it is to get that experience across into the public arena, and how the biggest abuse of those people comes from transgender activists.

"If you're making a decision, a life-changing decision about your sexuality, and you're going to actually go through surgery to make it irreversible, then do you want all the information available before you make that decision, or do you want only the information that some people would like you to have?"

Though lots of his criticism of contemporary progressive politics makes sense – the heightened censorship, the uncomfortably close relationship between large tech and social media corporations and left-wing politics – I do get the impression he is being a tad alarmist on other things. But of course, I would be alarmed too if I believed the increased visibility of transgendered individuals was the result of a global plan on behalf of "very high up" elites, vying to control the world.

I ask if it's the reptiles he thinks are behind the transgender movement, but Icke is reticent to reveal the truth. Instead, he encourages me to come along to his show, where he will cover the topic in detail, among other things during the four-hour long lecture.

He leaves me with a classic piece of conspiracy theorist wisdom: "Ask yourself, what subjects can I not have a different opinion about? What subjects can you not talk about outside the official narrative, without getting instant abuse, instant shutdown, instant censorship?

"Nothing's black and white, but it has to be painted black and white. Shades of grey, they don't want to go there, because that's a bit more complicated and it's more about subtlety. Propaganda's not about subtlety, it's about black and white."

"But I live in the shades of grey, and I ain't moving."

HE ARGUES THAT THE MODERN LEFT HAS BEEN FUNDED INTO EXISTENCE BY NONE OTHER THAN GEORGE SOROS AND IS ACTIVELY ATTEMPTING TO UNDERMINE PEOPLE'S CULTURAL AND POLITICAL FREEDOMS UNDER THE BANNER OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS.

THE REPORT

CANCELLED

“CANCEL CULTURE” IS THE POLITICAL EQUIVALENT OF ROAD RAGE, AND IT’S IN THE PROCESS OF DESTROYING HARD-WON EMPLOYEE RIGHTS.
BY HELEN DALE

EVERYONE who hasn’t spent the last six months under a rock knows about Israel Folau and how he’s raised northwards of two million dollars to fund his religious freedom case. Bully for him. Already a millionaire, he’s not going short while litigating all the way to the High Court. Have you heard of Brian Leach, Andy Ngo, Noah Carl, or Beth Patch, though? All four are “little people” – in Ngo’s case literally as well as figuratively – and all have been “cancelled” in such a way as to put Folau’s situation in the shade.

Brian Leach worked as a “greeter” for downmarket UK supermarket chain ASDA in Dewsbury, Yorkshire. He was fired for sharing a well-known Billy Connolly stand-up routine poking fun at religion, including Islam’s fondness for suicide bombing. “Now that’s a bright idea,” Connolly said in between his usual swears. “Every time there’s a bang the world’s a wanker short”. This “sharing” was on Leach’s personal Facebook profile. Terrifyingly, the complaints came from seven work colleagues – people he thought were his friends. Leach is 55 years old and disabled.

CANCE
ISRAEL FOLAU

Noah Carl was a junior academic at St Edmund's College, Cambridge who had – perhaps unwisely – done research into stereotype accuracy. He had (consistent with most work in this area) found that common stereotypes are statistically accurate. In one paper, for example, he found that opposition to immigrants of different nationalities correlates strongly with their arrest rates in the UK. This was completed while he was still a student at Oxford, but once he won a prestigious academic fellowship at "the other place", cancel culture went into overdrive. First targeted online (particularly on Twitter) by open letter and accused of promulgating "racist pseudoscience", St Edmund's later experienced weekly protests against his appointment. It advised Carl to stay away from college grounds and not speak to the press. In the end – despite offering up the figleaf of two internal inquiries – it sacked him. Carl is a 28-year-old scientist with an Oxford doctorate. He is currently unemployed.

Andy Ngo is a photojournalist for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Quillette*, and *The Australian*. He's also a beady-eyed senior copyeditor for Quillette. In late June – while covering an "antifa" rally in his native Portland, Oregon – he was beaten and hospitalised, and had his camera stolen. Local police stood idly by. The beating seems to have come about in part because his employers have his back. "Antifa", meanwhile, bears comparison with football firms and other manifestations of gang culture that give hopeless, underachieving men an outlet. There have always been people for whom violence is exciting; "antifa" lets them clothe this deeply unattractive attribute in politically noble clothes. Ngo is a physically small, placid man; he's going to be on "light duties" for a while.

I've observed before that I could write about people "cancelled" thanks to offendotrons on a weekly basis and often have to resist the impulse. I have given way this time because two of the people whose stories are sketched out above are friends. I took Ngo around the British Museum last year (my standard offer to US visitors in Blighty) and observed the seriousness with which he takes his art. I too went to Oxford and knew Carl before any controversy emerged. I assisted him in obtaining legal representation to bring a claim against St Edmund's.

BUT EVEN WHEN INCORPORATED IN AN EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT, SOCIAL MEDIA POLICIES CANNOT OVERRULE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND DUTIES EMBEDDED IN THE *FWA*.

Writing about both of them using only their surnames feels strange.

Closer to home, Beth Patch – a senior editor in publishing company Penguin Random House's Melbourne office – tweeted in support of bookshop staff keeping their Sunday penalty rates. While Patch is a member of a different union, the Media, Entertainment, and Arts Alliance (MEAA) rather than the Shop, Distributive, and Allied Employees (SDA), her tweet was lawful under the *Fair Work Act*. Indeed, the *FWA* is designed to protect employee (and trade union) speech in precisely these circumstances.

Despite this, Patch was called into a disciplinary hearing and given a "first and final warning". She deleted her tweet and has locked her Twitter account. The MEAA will be challenging her treatment in the Fair Work Commission. Meanwhile, someone – presumably Penguin Random House's in-house counsel – needs to sit down and explain to Patch's employer that disciplining someone for engaging in legal industrial activity is *the very mischief the FWA was drafted to address*.

Patch's story is important because it exposes how social media has completely broken many employers' ability to appreciate that they cannot direct their employees' minds out-of-hours. PRH's Human Resources Department presumably thought it was disciplining someone for tweeting in violation of the publisher's corporate social media policy. In that sense, what's been done to Patch is classic "cancel culture", like Brian Leach, Noah Carl, or Israel Folau. But even when incorporated in an employment contract, social media policies cannot overrule fundamental rights and duties embedded in the *FWA*. And somehow, PRH's HR department has failed to realise this.

If it's any consolation, most people have failed to make the connection, something that's led a number of lefty commentators – people who should know better – to sing the praises of Israel Folau's employment contract with Rugby Australia simply because they don't like the religious boot with which he kicks. The hard-won trade-union-derived right to engage in religious or political activity with which one's employer disagrees is being carelessly cast aside.

Like Folau, both Ngo and Carl have fundraisers – Ngo's set up while he was in hospital by a colleague, Carl's with the assistance of his solicitor. Meanwhile, Patch has an official campaign organised by her union. Initially, Leach tucked his tail between his legs, went home, and accepted his unhappy lot while Billy Connolly stayed safely ensconced (with his legions of fans) as a national treasure. Fortunately, UK charity the National Secular Society waded in – doing the sort of work trade unions used to do – and its in-house counsel were able to get him reinstated. It's also perhaps indicative of the horrors of US healthcare that some of Ngo's third party funds will go towards paying future medical bills – he suffered neurological damage during the assault (the technical term is "subarachnoid haemorrhage").

What is particularly telling is the extent to which social media

CANCELLED
NOAH CARL

CANCELLED
BETH PATCH

CANCELLED

ANDY NGO

was the vector for all four individuals' current circumstances. When people sign an employment contract mandating that they adhere (among other things) to a corporate social media policy or embody aspirational "brand values", there's always a clause (often directly underneath) that relieves the employer of the same duty. Yes, you read that right. You have to promise not to bring the company into disrepute but the company itself can shit all over its "core values". That's how bank employees get fired for miss-selling investment products while the only way to make the Big Four banks accountable for *their* egregious behaviour was to hold a Royal Commission.

Relatedly, unless a bank employee takes to social media to boast about shafting the customers, it's entirely possible he won't be fired – only disciplined internally. The net effect of this is that people are sacked or disciplined for minor social media breaches simply because they occur in public while employees who quietly (but seriously) breach their employment contract often face fewer consequences. Late capitalism's social media and brand management mania is actively inimical to civil society.

It should go without saying that what "antifa" did to Ngo was worse than Leach and Carl getting sacked, or Patch being disciplined. Of late, however, I've been forced to restate in simple terms basic rules about interacting with political opponents, particularly journalists. Social media has so thinned the membrane between "the bad thought" all of us have from time to time and actually carrying it out that people need to be reminded that bashing reporters from politically opposed publications is unacceptable behaviour.

In that sense, "antifa" is as obsessed with brand management as Penguin Random House, Rugby Australia, ASDA, or St Edmund's College, Cambridge. One of its principles is that unfriendly media organisations should not have the right to cover its activities, even on public property. This is why "antifa" doesn't want journalists from centre-right or centre-left media (even staid CNN has experienced a hostile reception) covering its rallies. If you want to understand late capitalism, a so-called "resistance" outfit's desire to massage its message is something of a headline case.

There's also the basic reality that road rage is what happens when people act on "the bad thought". Who hasn't occasionally experienced a desire to take to mid-lane-merchants ("merchant banker" being Cockney rhyming slang for "wanker") on the motorway with an RPG? The only reason road rage happens far less often than white-hot anger at being stuck in traffic is because drivers generally know to wind their necks in. "The bad thought" is confined to the roughly 90 cubic inches between most people's ears in combination with leaning on the horn.

I had "the bad thought" about thumping journalists trespassing on my parents' property during the controversy over my novel, *The Hand that Signed the Paper*. Unlike Ngo, I really am large and strong and capable of doing terrible damage to someone smaller than me, particularly if he's burdened with photographic equipment. But I knew 20-plus years ago – instinctively, intuitively – that part of the price of living in a liberal democracy is journalists get a degree of latitude to act like bellends. If you don't allow them that latitude, you're really not far removed from Putin's thugs or any other tin-pot third-world dictator you care to name.

LATE CAPITALISM'S SOCIAL MEDIA AND BRAND MANAGEMENT MANIA IS ACTIVELY INIMICAL TO CIVIL SOCIETY.

Of course there are limits. *The News of the World* hacking murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler's mobile phone and derailing the subsequent police investigation limned the boundary of what the Great British Public would tolerate and nearly brought about a statutory press regulator. I'm glad that didn't happen, but the Leveson Inquiry and subsequent debate about media behaviour drew a civil society if not a legislative line. Certain things (journalists wiring themselves up to record people secretly, staking out drug rehabilitation clinics frequented by celebrities, or editing interviews so their subjects appear foolish or contradictory) became beyond the pale. In this context, it's worth noting that Ngo – an unusually careful practitioner of the reporter's craft – has never given a hint of channelling the now-defunct *News of the World*.

It's nonetheless true that getting someone sacked often operates as a handy substitute for violence. Australian legal academic Russell Blackford has written (in a book-length study of the phenomenon, *The Tyranny of Opinion*) how cybermobs set out to "destroy" opponents, and one of the easiest ways to do this is to deprive them of the means to earn a living. I have told four individual stories here; Blackford tells hundreds and admits his database is far from complete; you can no doubt think of several without much effort. In days gone by, bringing down a prominent politician or celebrity by dint of whipping up controversy and outrage was something that happened, if not particularly regularly. These days, similar campaigns are directed against people with little ability to defend themselves. Carl and Leach and Patch are in a genuine spot. All four are a reminder there's a vast gulf between high profile cases like Folau's and what happens to little people.

You don't win at road rage, no matter how righteous the anger you feel in the moment. Getting someone fired because you disagree with his views isn't a win either. You change no minds and do no good, least of all for your own cause. "Cancel culture" absolves us of the duty to recall that political disagreements are mediated by debates and elections, not by getting opponents sacked. "Cancel culture" suggests it's possible to win at politics without bringing the electorate along.

It isn't.

Helen Dale won the Miles Franklin Award for her first novel, The Hand that Signed the Paper*, and read law at Oxford. Her latest novel,* Kingdom of the Wicked*, was shortlisted for the Prometheus Award for science fiction. She lives in London.*

ANTI FA
HR

OPINION

THOUGHT POLICE AND PC-PRIESTS

THERE'S AN IRONY IN THE PC-LEFT APPLYING THE TACTICS OF THE OLD CHRISTIAN INQUISITORS. BY BRENDAN O'NEILL

THE list of things you aren't allowed to say grows longer by the day. You aren't allowed to say homosexuality is a sin, as Israel Folau has discovered.

You aren't allowed to say that men and women are different, as the Canadian feminist Meghan Murphy now knows, having been banned for life from Twitter for saying "men aren't women, though".

You aren't allowed to say Muhammad had an iffy sex life. Just ask the woman in Austria who was found guilty of "disparaging religious doctrines" when she suggested the Prophet had a thing for underage girls.

You aren't allowed to make fun of the niqab or burka, as Britain's new Prime Minister Boris Johnson found out when he said women who drape themselves in this "oppressive and ridiculous" garment look like bank robbers and letterboxes.

All hell rained down on Boris when he made that witty quip. He was branded a hater, a bigot, and, of course, an Islamophobe.

"Phobe" – this is what you will be called if you transgress the boundaries of Acceptable Thought and say things you aren't meant to say.

In the past they would have called you a heretic or blasphemer – now they prefer "phobe".

The irony is that the Folau-bashers – Folauphobes, perhaps? – accuse Folau of adhering to archaic Christian beliefs, and yet they themselves are aping archaic Christian practices.

Christianity, in its earlier stiffer, more intolerant incarnation, punished holders of incorrect beliefs and spouters of heretical thought. And now the supposedly post-Christian PC set does the same thing. They even use the same language as the pointy-hatted priests of old.

The people dragged before the Inquisition were accused of being "deniers", usually of the truth of the Bible. Question climate change today and you'll also be branded a "denier".

An award-winning British greenie has even called for the setting-up of "international criminal tribunals" for climate-change deniers, where they will "have to answer for their crimes". Hello, Eco-Inquisition.

And where the old Christian policers of thought and speech would accuse heretics of polluting men's souls, of damaging society itself, so the PC set now insists that so-called "hate speech" corrupts the social order.

If Israel Folau is allowed to say gay sex is a sin, or Meghan Murphy is allowed to question the idea that a man can transition into womanhood, or Boris is allowed to take the piss out of the

THE WAR ON FOLAU'S RIGHT TO BELIEVE AND SPEAK AS HE SEES FIT IS A GREATER THREAT TO THE SOCIAL FABRIC THAN FOLAU'S OWN VIEWS.

Question any aspect of the gay lifestyle and you're a homophobe.

Wonder out loud if Islam is a bit weird and you're an Islamophobe.

Blaspheme against the new ideology of genderfluidity and you're a transphobe.

Phobes won't be burnt at the stake, as heretics once were. But they will find themselves hounded off social media, thrown out of their jobs, banned from university campuses, protested against by irate, gurning SJWs, and treated as unpersons.

We live in alarmingly intolerant times. It is now widely accepted in PC circles that there are some ideas that should not be expressed in public and that anyone who does express them deserves to be punished, to be cast out as surely as McCarthyites cast out suspected Commies and the Inquisition cast out deniers of God's truth.

This is the great irony of the persecution of Israel Folau. And "persecution" really isn't too strong a word for it. This man has seen his career and reputation go up in metaphorical flames simply because he holds particular beliefs, simply because he doesn't like the idea of two men getting down to it.

niqab, then these various minority groups will find themselves under great strain, we're told.

Their adherents will become depressed. They might even be attacked. Apparently, any criticism whatsoever of homosexuality or the trans ideology or Islam will convince the more bovine sections of society to go out and bash the nearest gay person or trans person or Muslim.

This is a fancier way of saying that these ideas, these criticisms, pollute men's souls. It is the same old censoriousness dressed up in PC lingo.

Many people will disagree with Folau's views on homosexuality. I certainly do.

But the hounding of him is a far greater problem than what he himself thinks and says. The war on Folau's right to believe and speak as he sees fit is a greater threat to the social fabric than Folau's own views.

It is part of a surging new intolerance that thinks nothing of shutting down people who have Incorrect Thoughts. And that should scare you far more than one rugby player's Instagram posts.

INFOCUS

BEN TSUI

INSTAGRAM
@BENTSUIPHOTOS

WEBSITE
BENTSUIPHOTOS.COM

BEN Tsui is a Hong Kong-born, LA-raised photographer. A self-described 'Valley Kid', he tells us about his early experiences with photography, his inspirations and how his style has shifted over the years. This shoot comes all the way from his home in Southern California and features a diverse mix of beautiful scenery, soft natural light and, of course, stunning models doing what they do best.

Where did you grow up?
I was born in Hong Kong, moved to Los Angeles when I was 11 years old and grew up in North Hollywood – a typical valley kid.

What was your first experience with photography?
My grandfather used to do a lot of travelling deep into China. He would show me pictures he'd taken of people he'd met in small villages, temples in the mountains and tombs in the desert. I thought they were very cool.

Who were your early influences?
When I first started shooting people, I was really intrigued by the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson, Helmut Newton and Ray Metzker.

What was your first big break?
When I was offered a position as a newsagency staff photographer. At that time, I was a retail manager by day and a bouncer at a club in Hollywood by night.

How has your style changed over time?
I've become more of a purist, employing less tricks with my photography. I used to incorporate a lot of graphic design elements, typical of a style commonly found in advertising. I find myself allowing the mood of the shoot to take over more now.

What makes a good shot when you're photographing models?
The model has to feel effortlessly free and powerful so she can connect with herself and the environment. It's the photographer's job to help her get there. When she does – everything will fall into place.

Tell us about some of the places you've travelled to.
Being based in Southern California, I can say I'm pretty spoiled when it comes to photo locations. There are mountains, oceans, lakes, rivers, deserts, forests, flat plains, fields, incredible architecture – all within a couple of hours' drive. This makes it easy to do most of my work close to home. I've also done some shoots in Asia and Central America while on vacation.

Tell us about your favourite places to shoot.
Tokyo at night was pretty awesome. Shooting in the middle of the Shibuya Crossing in the rain with a sea of people spread out in front of me – it was exhilarating.

If you could shoot anywhere in the world, where would it be?
I would love to shoot all over Europe, from West to East. Anywhere and everywhere. Everything seems like a brochure for inspiration.

One tip for budding *Penthouse* photographers?
Make every shoot an enjoyable experience for yourself and everyone you work with.

FROM VISIONARY PRODUCER GUILLERMO DEL TORO
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SCREENPLAY BY DAN HAGEMAN & KEVIN HAGEMAN DIRECTED BY ANDRÉ ØVREDAL
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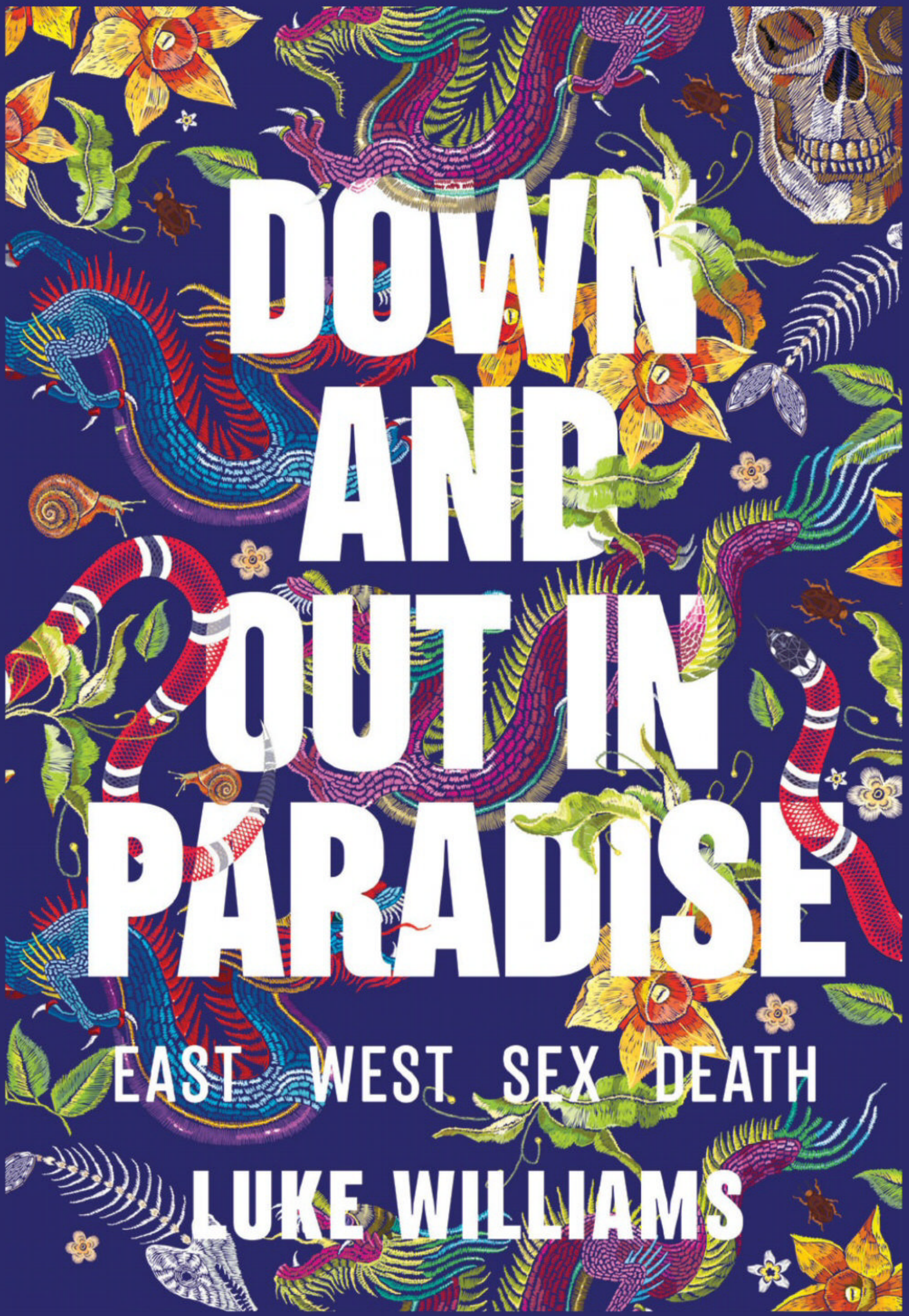
DOWN AND OUT IN PARADISE
EAST WEST SEX DEATH
LUKE WILLIAMS

LIFE/STYLE

TOPLESS BEAUTY

AUDI TT RS ROADSTER | FIVE FITNESS TRIBES | THE HOTTEST BARBEQUES | SNEAKER UPDATE | SHIRTS FOR SPRING

HOTTEST CONVERTIBLE

AUDI TT RS ROADSTER

The newest iteration of Audi's classic roadster is noticeably more masculine in its appearance.

FINALLY, the weather is warming up. Which means when we're driving, it's aircon on its most arctic setting or windows as far down as they'll go.

Or better yet, get yourself into a convertible and do away with recycled air (that's how air-conditioning works, right?) and windows that don't nearly give you the breeze you need. Pop the lid and live the life of a true motorist – among the elements, with the sound of a roaring engine mixed in with the wind.

Okay, without getting overly romantic about it, for lovers of revs, nothing beats a convertible. A motorcycle comes close in raw petrol-powered excitement, but still lacks a certain class that remains the province of luxury convertible vehicles.

And class – the Audi TT RS Roadster has in spades. And power too. While it's never been short on grunt, the newest iteration of the TT from our favourite four-ringed marque is decidedly more masculine. A "completely redrawn" fascia gives the newest model a more aggressive façade. A motorsports-inspired front spoiler, along with side winglets attached to the fixed rear wing completes the look.

At the heart of the TT RS continues to be the turbocharged five-cylinder gasoline engine pushing out a healthy 400 horsepower and 354 pound-feet of torque. The International Engine of the Year for the ninth time in a row, the 2.5 TFSI enables the roadster to hit 100 kph in 3.7 seconds en route to an electronically governed 250 kph or an optional 280 kph.

Australian release dates still unannounced, but we expect by the end of year we'll be seeing them in showrooms across the country, with prices starting out at roughly $112,000 for the roadster (or slightly cheaper if you're interested in keeping the top on).

YOUR FITNESS TRIBE

THE GYM JUNKIE

What's the point of going to the gym if you're not going to look good while doing it? Whether you're a weights man, a cardio junkie or a circuit enthusiast, this selection will see you through the year in style.

1. **FITBIT**, $119 AT AMAZON / 2. SHIRT BY **FALKE ESS**, $184 AT MATCHESFASHION.COM / 3. SHORTS BY **NIKE**, $66 AT FARFETCH / 4. SHOES BY **SALOMON/S LAB**, $293 AT FARFETCH / 5. WATERBOTTLE BY **CORKCICLE**, $114.95 AT EVERTEN

YOUR FITNESS TRIBE

THE YOGI

The path to enlightenment is great – but sturdy, throw-it-around yoga mats that aren't too short, too pink or too – you know – *girly*? That's something guaranteed to help you reach Nirvana.

1. LEGGINGS BY **P.E NATION**, $181 AT MATCHESFASHION.COM / 2. MAT BY **LULULEMON**, $118 (APPROX.) AT LULULEMON

YOUR FITNESS TRIBE

THE TOUR DE FORCE

Cycling is an endurance sport, where looks come second to function and form. But you knew that, right? The good news is there's a crop of brands marrying cutting-edge technology with sleek styling. Win, win.

1. WATER BOTTLE BY **CAFÉ DU CYCLISTE**, $19 AT MR PORTER / 2. JACKET BY **2XU**, $262 AT MATCHESFASHION.COM / 3. JERSEY BY **POC**, $135 AT MR PORTER

YOUR FITNESS TRIBE

THE CALIFORNIA DREAMER

Here's to three months spent living in shorts, thongs and little else. With that in mind, make sure they're good ones: Stockpile Havis, and invest in a good quality pair of boardies that will last you a lifetime.

1. SHORTS BY **ONIA**, $247 AT MATCHESFASHION.COM / 2. BAMBOO SERIES SURFBOARD BY **CIRCLE ONE**, APPROX. $776 / 3. TANK TOP BY **THE UPSIDE**, $82 / 4. THONGS BY **HAVIANAS**, $29.95 / 5. MRS. PALMER'S SURF WAX, $4.99 AT SURF SHOP AUSTRALIA

YOUR FITNESS TRIBE

THE SLOPE MONKEY

Powder-filled Japanese slopes are a mere plane ride away – and with the selection of snowboard-and-ski paraphernalia on offer right now, you'll be booking a ticket sooner than you can say "wipe out".

1

2

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6

4

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1. BALACLAVA BY **ANON**, $96 AT MR PORTER / 2. GLASSES BY **GCDS**, $153 AT FARFETCH / 3. SKI JACKET BY **BURTON**, $666 / 4. JUMPER BY **MOSCHINO**, $251 / 5. TROUSERS BY **PEAK PERFORMANCE**, $671 / 6. SNOWBOARD BY **BURTON**, $816

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HOTTEST BBQS

LICENSE TO GRILL

You should infra-read this guide if you're thinking about buying a barbie this year.

BBQ Pitmaster is a show about barely intelligible southerners from the USA standing around with their jaws slackened and their racks of ribs slow-cooked. Sad indictment on the state of contemporary commercial TV or not, this is one of the best shows on television at the moment.

We love it so much at the *Penthouse* offices, we thought we'd channel our inner hillbilly by slapping on a circa-2000s trucker's hat, cracking out the grill and having ourselves an old-fashioned cookout – with a slightly modern twist. The boys on *Pitmaster* may prefer woodchips and coal, but we opted instead for the power and precision of infrared technology.

In some circles, barbecuing sans smoker is sacrilege, but being accustomed to a life of sin, we transgressed.

The salespeople say the intensity and even distribution of heat on infrared barbecues produce juicy results and, of course, there's the added advantage of having total control over the temperature. They also claim the tech is so good, the best examples are akin to traditional tried and true coal barbies.

So, in the steadily warming Sydney weather, we donned our novelty apron that reads, "Rock out with your Crock Out" and fired up three different infrared barbecues to test whether they're as hot as their supporters claim they are.

CHAR-BROIL PERFORMANCE SERIES 2-BURNER GAS GRILL

IF you're looking to save space and money – the Char-Broil Performance Series is a great compromise. Retaining the core fundamental features of the other infrared barbecues on this list and coming in under $1000, this little beauty is a bargain. Also, its grill tray is deceptively deep, with enough space for the whole barnyard. The tradeoff? It doesn't have as many features as some of the other grills on this list, and its build and design quality is somewhat lower.

RRP: $899 available from *Harveynorman.com.au*

HEATSTRIP 'CROSSRAY' 2-BURNER BUILT-IN BBQ

FOR the pit master pilgrim, vowing to barbecue in one place is a solemn and sacred commitment, and is not a step he takes lightly. But if you are ready to take the plunge and stay wedded – in under or overcooked food – to one location for the remainder of your grilling days, so help you God, then say "I do" to this 2-Burner built-in option from Crossray. It has similar bells and whistles to its portable 4-burner stablemate, just a slightly more compact grilling area and a smaller number on the price tag.

RRP: $1199 available from *Harveynorman.com*

HEATSTRIP CROSSRAY 4-BURNER BBQ

SIMPLY put, the Heatstrip Crossray 4-Burner BBQ is one of the best infrared barbies on the market. The result of 10 years of research, it features four laterally mounted infrared burners to evenly distribute heat across its huge grill space. A two-piece upper grill area adds 60 percent more surface area, as well as providing room to slow cook large meats like chicken or ribs, as well as any delicate veggies or fish. The Crossray is the only BBQ on the market that gives total control over the grill's temperature, from as low as 110 degrees all the way up to a scorching 400 degrees. Most of all, 'cos we're lazy, we like how easy this thing is to clean. Just turn it up all the way for a couple of minutes and it incinerates any residual fat and grease

RRP: $1999 available from *Harveynorman.com.au*

To book a personal in-store demonstration go to **crossray.com.au/book-an-in-store**

STYLE UP

MAN OF STYLE: **BLONDEY**

BLONDEY McCoy is one of those guys – cool without looking like he's trying too hard; stylish without looking like he put too much thought into what he's wearing; frustratingly good with girls, even though he looks like any other of those 10-a-penny skating dudes you see sipping an IPA at the local.

An artist-cum-skater-cum-model, the 20-year-old Londoner is instantly recognisable for his gold-capped front tooth and stack of chunky gold signet rings. He's worked with Burberry, Fred Perry and Palace, regularly shoots with i-D and has amassed a cool 240,000 Instagram followers thanks to his trademark mix of style and self-deprecation (example: he captioned a photo of himself sipping coffee on a private jet with "Failing miserably in my attempt to be the first person to have their photo taken on a private jet without look like an utter cunt".)

He staged his fifth solo art exhibition, "Us and Chem", at the Heni Gallery in London in mid-2017 – including a collaborative work with Damien Hirst (casual) – accompanying the 12-piece collection with a coffee table book in late 2018. As for 2019? Modelling is on the horizon – he's recently signed with Kate Moss' modelling agency ("Please don't laugh, I can't believe it either", he captioned the announcement).

Follow @blondey.

GRAPH IT UP

SNEAKER UPDATE

A soft shoe worn for sports or casual occasions; the sneaker has come along way over the years. With fashion houses now joining the ever-growing field of sport trainers, we thought it was time to take a look at how some of the bigger brands rank against the classic sport brands with our Price vs Function graph

1. **BALENCIAGA**, $1,455 / 2. **GUCCI**, $1,060 / 3. **PRADA**, $1131 / 4. **OFF-WHITE**, $685
5. **GOLDEN GOOSE**, $550 / 6. **VEJA**, $194 / 7. **LACOSTE**, $149 / 8. **ADIDAS**, $139

SHIRT UP

SPRING BREAK

MR KOYA is a a men's label focusing exclusively on the iconic short-sleeve button-down shirt. Style loves flavour, and they only design timeless classics you won't find anywhere else. Check out their store: *au.mrkoya.com*

1. **ORIGINS**, $85

2. **HAYASHI**, $76

3. **SANGUINE**, $76

4. **LIKE A TIGER**, $76

PHOTOS: AMIE WEE

INTERVIEW

THE GIN BOSS

GIN AND **LEON DALLOWAY** GO TOGETHER LIKE G&T. INTERVIEW BY AMIE WEE

KICKED back on a leather couch at a distillery on Sydney's North Shore, a refreshing rockmelon Collins in hand, I listen as London bartender-turned-"gintrepreneur" Leon "The Gin Boss" Dalloway tells me how he went from pouring drinks for a living to getting paid to drink them.

"Like most people, I fell into bartending because I needed a job," says the gin expert. "But I quickly fell in love with it, and it was through bartending that I learnt how cool spirits can be."

A few slugs into my cocktail, I'm starting to see why Dalloway's such a hit. He's a charismatic, funny guy, with a loud laugh that booms through the bar. It's obvious he knows his shit, but he isn't pretentious. And the man loves to drink. He's the ideal drinking buddy. Which is exactly why his personalised booze tour, The Gin Journey, is so popular. "It's basically a posh bar crawl for cocktail and gin enthusiasts," he says.

The craze has also seen the rise of gin clubs as well as subscriptions, where people have gin arrive at their door on a regular basis. "A magazine in the UK did an article on a company I was working for that released a gin advent calendar and they sold more than 70,000 of them in two hours," Dalloway laughs. "They had to package quick. Gin is blowing up; it's exploding. There is so much cool, exciting stuff in the gin world right now. Vodka was the clear spirit choice from the 1960s, but people are drawn to the fact that gin is more quirky and interesting."

WHAT DOES THE AVERAGE *PENTHOUSE* READER NEED TO PULL OFF KILLER COCKTAILS AT HOME?

"You don't need cocktail shakers; you just need a big jam jar. And quality ice – that's what people take for granted. You buy a crappy bag of ice, use that and suddenly your cocktails are over-diluted. Invest in some quality ice trays. I've got one freezer drawer dedicated to ice, purely so I can make nice drinks. Stock up on fresh fruit and herbs to use as garnishes. Get some nice glassware. If you've got all that, you can start experimenting with nice infusions. Sugar syrup is the cheapest ingredient in the world: half sugar, half warm water, stir it together until it's dissolved. Chuck some rosemary and lavender in it and you're going to get this beautiful flavoured syrup. You can then go ahead and make a lavender Tom Collins or a rosemary Tom Collins."

As far as Dalloway's concerned, even the classic G&T has improved over time. "I think people got to the point where they were like, 'Well, no longer does the gin and tonic have to be two cubes of ice that have diluted by the time it's on the table with a slimy piece of lemon.' I always picture it in a sad pub in England, with no music on and a smelly carpet floor. Nowadays, people are creating premium tonics with natural sweeteners and natural citric. The result is a tasty tonic that really helped push the gin and tonic to where it is now."

Does a more expensive brand of gin make for a better tasting drink? Not necessarily. "Never pay over 100 bucks for a bottle of gin or else you're paying for the bottle," says Dalloway. "If you do that, make sure you at least use it as a nice candle holder afterwards"

So, what about the people making the gin? Following the craft beer trend, new artisan and bespoke distilleries are popping up all over Australia and abroad. Dalloway explains how, in the UK, a change in licensing and distillation laws is partly to thank for the gin boom. He explains that before 2009, your still had to be 1,500 litres or bigger, meaning you had to buy an expensive still and invest a lot into the alcohol that went into it. "If you messed up, you were screwed." The changing laws meant you could buy a 200-litre still so you didn't have to invest as much in the alcohol, making the whole process more accessible.

"A lot of people who've been working in banking, insurance or whatever for years, maybe they've lost their job and they think, 'Well, what can I do? I've got a bit of money, I'm going to set up a distillery.' It can be done. People have seen it can be done and they're following suit and carving out a life for themselves," says Dalloway.

"NEVER PAY OVER 100 BUCKS FOR A BOTTLE OF GIN OR ELSE YOU'RE PAYING FOR THE BOTTLE".

"There have been a few gin car crashes recently, though," he laughs, telling me about Skinny Gin, which claimed to help people lose weight. "It was absolute bollocks.

"When it comes down to it, a gin needs to be a gin. It needs to be juniper-forward. Without it being juniper-forward, it's not really a gin – it's more a flavoured vodka. It's important for distilleries to really make sure that the juniper content and flavour profile is right. As boundary pushing and modern as it can be, you still need to hold true to the history of gin."

So what does Dalloway think of the gin scene Down Under?

"Australia has one of the most exciting gin scenes in the world," he says, telling me that we, like Scotland, use indigenous botanicals in our gin. "Australia has a unique style of distillation. People are using botanicals from just down the road." The distillery we're at, Manly Spirits Co., for example, uses Australian native and marine botanicals such as sea lettuce and finger lime. "It's exciting that all of these gins are emerging which show the character from where they're from. This wasn't happening 20 years ago."

But will gin ever hit the heights of whisky's collectability? It's a yes from Dalloway. "I'm seeing a lot of couples getting a nice bottle of gin, getting some premium tonics and good garnishes. They start a nice little collection and when they have friends over, they'll show it off."

Couples aside, why are rappers so mad for it? "That's a great question," Dalloway laughs. "Snoop likes Tanqueray. Amy Winehouse wasn't a rapper but she loved it as well. The '90s rap scene was well into gin – I think it was just the drink of the time. Well, that and some of them probably got some sweet deals out of it – a little money in the back pocket…"

AUSTRALIAN GINS

MANLY SPIRITS CO

Barrel Aged: A deep and beautifully rich gin. I would love to see this in a Martinez. Stir it down with red vermouth, maraschino liqueur and a touch of orange bitters and you've got yourself a drink of the gods.

Dry Gin: This has a real native Northern Beaches feel to it. It tastes like the walk from Manly Beach to Shelley. I'd love this in a G&T with Fever-Tree Mediterranean Tonic and a leaf of lemon myrtle.

Coastal Citrus Gin: One of the best citrus forward gins I've ever tasted due to the lemon aspen. Serve it up in a White Lady and this gin will soar. Grab some fresh egg white, lemon, sugar syrup and orange liqueur and shake like you mean it. Double strain and pour into a chilled Martini glass.

UNDERGROUND SPIRITS

Signature Gin: A classic Aussie number. I like the thought of this in a Southside. Shaken gin with lime, sugar syrup and mint strained into a Martini glass and we're away.

Shiraz & Pepper Berry Gin: The Shiraz is subtle and the pepper berry sidelines it nicely. Shake it up in a Bramble with lemon, sugar and drizzle over some Creme de Mure and it'll be tasty.

HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU, KID

Wild Rose Gin: A very fragrant and feminine gin. Would sit nicely in a rose and lychee Martini. Grab some lychee liqueur, lemon and sugar syrup, and shake it up and pour into a martini glass with no ice. Garnish with a rose petal and you're ready to party.

STRAIT

Sloe Gin: Sloe berries sourced from Evandale Orchard make this a uniquely Tasmanian gin. Goes down sweet as a liqueur on ice.

Hazelnut Gin: Impress your mates by serving up a round of decadent hazelnut flavoured espresso Martinis at your next gathering.

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PARADISE FOUND

PHOTOGRAPHER
JOAKIM KARLSSON

MODEL
JULIA YAROSHENKO

JOAKIM Karlsson is one of our favourite photographers. His work has a raw beauty that's difficult to ignore, and the shoot over the next few pages is no exception. The stunning Julia looks wild as hell, and the pristine water and tropical jungles makes us feel like we're still on holidays.

JOAKIM and Julia spend their days travelling the world and taking incredible pictures. Here they explain their love of travel and their personal tips for enjoying each place they visit.

Why do you love to travel?
New, sometimes difficult circumstances inspire us as we break habitual patterns and start from scratch every day.

We find new, hidden abilities that we didn't know we had. This motivates us to keep going and makes it impossible to stop travelling. That's why for the whole of last year, we spent only 10 days at home.

What's your favourite kind of destination?
Julia: We appreciate small islands and huge cities. Each location has its secrets and surprises. Every city or island has such individual character.

How do travel and new destinations influence your photography?
Joakim: Working in new places is always exciting. The anticipation in the lead-up to travelling to a new destination motivates us to be well-prepared. New locations inspire the eye, although only a small part of them are in the frame.

I like to study and work all the time in new, unknown conditions. This gives me space for personal and professional growth.

What's been the biggest cultural shock while travelling?
We may get surprised sometimes – but it's not easy to shock us. We don't compare other people with ourselves or other cultures with that of our country – we simply accept them.

Do you have any hot travel tips for us?
Smile and take a positive attitude: this is the most valuable thing you need to pack in your suitcase, this is our big secret.

You're going travelling and you can bring the clothes on your back along with three other items – what are they?
Julia: Yoga mat, philosophy book, sunscreen
Joakim: Camera, portable speaker, and of course, the latest issue of *Penthouse.*

What's next for you guys?
The beginning of any trip is amazing! We are always positive and ready for anything new. We will surprise you by visiting the most unexplored and unusual regions of this wonderful world.

Follow us!
Instagram: julia_yaroshenko
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FEATURE

THE LIFE OF PABLO

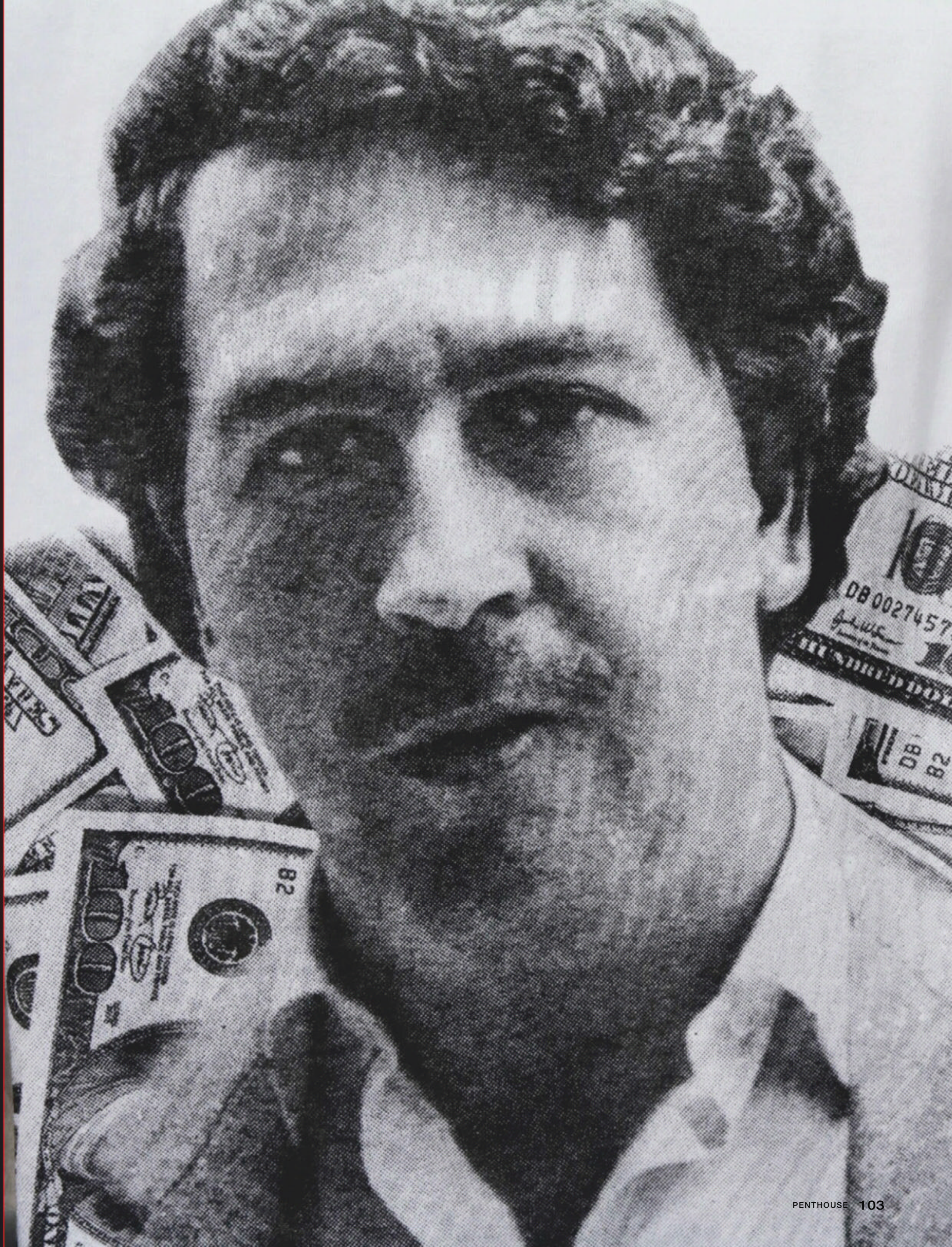
TO THIS DAY, FAMED DRUG KINGPIN PABLO ESCOBAR CONTINUES TO CAPTURE THE IMAGINATIONS OF THOUSANDS OF "NARCO-TOURISTS" WHO TRAVEL TO COLOMBIA EACH YEAR TO LEARN ABOUT HIS LIFE.
BY IAN LLOYD NEUBAUER

WHEN it comes to divisive historical figures, few hold a candle to Pablo Escobar.

The richest drug trafficker the world has ever seen, Escobar was responsible for 80 percent of the cocaine smuggled into the US throughout the 1980s and the subsequent murder of some 4,000 people – rival traffickers, journalists, policemen, judges, a presidential candidate, government ministers, innocent bystanders and even his own mistress – until he was taken down in a hail of bullets in the city of Medellin in 1993.

But for millions of Colombians, Escobar was a folk hero – a real-life Robin Hood who built schools, soccer fields, churches and hospitals for the poor. He even built an entire suburb from scratch for 500 families previously living on a rubbish tip. Officially, it's called Medellin Sin Tugurios (Medellin Without Slums) but to its residents will always be known as Barrio Pablo Escobar (Pablo Escobar's Hood).

To better understand Escobar's life and legacy, I travelled to Medellin and signed up for one of the dozen-odd Pablo Escobar Tours cashing in on *Narcos*, the insanely popular Netflix series on Colombia's drug cartels.



View of Medellin from Comuna 13

"Seventy percent of the people in Medellin still love him," says Wilson Rodriguez, a silver-tongued ex-con who now works as a narco-guide with Medellin City Services. "Yes, Pablo killed thousands, but on the other hand, he was one of those amazing people who come around once every 100 years. He ran a multi-billion dollar company without a single computer – it was all in his head. Too bad he used his talent for evil. I am 50-50 on his legacy, because the violence affected me personally, though not as bad as other people who lost loved ones because of Pablo."

COMUNA 13

"Please don't go on one of those stupid Pablo Escobar tours. It was a very painful chapter in our lives," says Lina Posada, a media professional I met soon after arriving in the city of four million people *TIME* magazine dubbed "the most dangerous" on Earth in the year of Escobar's death but which is now rated as South America's most innovative and liveable metropolis. "We don't want narcoturistas here just as we don't want sex tourists. It's like going to Germany and visiting Adolf Hitler's house."

From the outset, the warning rang true as Wilson hammed it up on the drive from my hotel in Medellin's trendy El Poblado district to Comuna 13. Formerly one of Medellin's most dangerous hillside districts, Comuna 13 attracts hordes of tourists every day who arrive in busloads to ogle at the famous graffiti murals adorning its walls. "If you hear gunshots when we get there, hit the floor," Wilson tells me. "They will kill someone in this city and 20 minutes later a little old lady will be walking her dog past a stain on the ground like nothing ever happened. I have an undershirt made of kevlar. If you want one, just ask. I got a few spares in the back."

I challenge my guide with some of the official crime statistics I've dug up. In 1991, 6349 homicides were reported in Medellin – nearly triple the homicide rate of Caracas in neighbouring Venezuela, currently the most dangerous city in the world. Yet last year Medellin's homicide annual rate had dropped by more than 90 percent to 577.

"You can believe what you want," Wilson replies, "but I got a friend who works in the government who told me the homicide rate has gone right down because La Officina (The Office) – the leftovers of Pablo's old gang – visit the statistics office every year with briefcases full of cash so they keep the numbers down. More than 95 percent of murders in this city go unsolved. Why? Because Pablo taught these people if you open your mouth, you're dead. '*Plata o plomo*' (money or lead) he used to tell them. Which one you gonna' take? He broke their integrity, and those he couldn't buy, he killed them.

"So what happens now," he continues, "is they just 'disappear' your arse. Back in the day, Pablo had a private zoo where his *sicarios* (hitmen) fed their victims to Pablo's lions. Can you imagine that shit? Getting mauled by a lion? These Colombians do crazy shit.

"Today it's the same crap. They use 11-year-olds to kill people and dope them up with drugs. If they make it to 16 when they become legally responsible for their crimes, they also disappear them to make sure they never talk."

We don't hear any gunshots at Comuna 13. We do however hear a busker rap about Medellin's bad old days and see a breakdance performance by a bunch of very talented kids. The graffiti is spectacular, the most striking being a mural of a lion with two distinctive colour codes on either side of its face representing the good and bad sides of Escobar. It'd be naive to assume that dodgy shit no longer goes on here, though there's certainly no need for a kevlar vest as Wilson half-jokingly suggested. But as my guide becomes more comfortable with me, he forgoes the clichés most tourists want to hear and starts getting into the nitty-gritty details.

"*Narcos* was a good show but it was Hollywood," he says. "When they started filming here, his son Juan Pablo offered to open up his archives for them, but they turned him down. He once asked his father how much money they had and Pablo told him he didn't know because he stopped counting a long time ago. Pablo used to get phone calls from his people in Miami where he sent most of his cocaine saying they don't have space for one more dollar in their safe houses. So Pablo had to send over his Learjet and fill it up with cash." The claim makes sense. In 1989, *Forbes* ranked Escobar as the seventh richest person on the planet with daily revenues of US$60 million. He made so much money his accountants had to write-off 10 percent of earnings – some US$2 billion – to spoilage: C-notes that were chewed up by rats.)

"Pablo was not like he was portrayed on *Narcos*," Wilson says. "He never swore. He was a cool-arse dude. And he didn't smoke weed all day – only one joint before he went to bed at sunrise. Ever since his teenage years, Pablo used to get up at 2pm. He said he could think better at night when everyone was asleep. He'd have breakfast when the rest of us were coming home from work and then head out with his goon squad at night. Lots of people in Medellin had to adapt their sleeping habits to Pablo's."

THE CEMETERY

Our next stop is Medellín's Montesacro Cemetery where Escobar was laid to rest. Before he got into the cocaine business, Escobar made money from stealing tombstones, sandblasting the engravings and passing them on to smugglers for resale in neighbouring Panama. He also sold stolen cars, contraband American cigarettes and electrical appliances before the fateful day in 1975 when local drug lord Fabio Restrepo fronted him 10 kilograms of cocaine. A kilogram cost only US$2,000 in Colombia at the time but would fetch up to US$90,000 in the US.

"The profits were astronomical, much more than he made selling cigarettes," Wilson says. "So instead of paying Fabio, Pablo put a bullet in his head. The next day he told his men 'Your boss is dead. You work for me now.' Now, they didn't like the idea much but it worked out well for them because Pablo starting trafficking coke not by the kilogram but by the tonne. Pablo never wanted to sell drugs to Colombians. From the beginning, his idea was to sell

"MORE THAN 95 PERCENT OF MURDERS IN THIS CITY GO UNSOLVED. WHY? BECAUSE PABLO TAUGHT THESE PEOPLE IF YOU OPEN YOUR MOUTH, YOU'RE DEAD."

it in the US. Pablo said in an interview once this was our atomic bomb against the Americans. He would tell Colombians selling coke is not a crime – it's the user who's the criminal – not the trafficker.

"That was Pablo's genius," Wilson explains. "He had a way of convincing people of anything, that it was them or us. At the height of his power, he had 3000 sicarios working under him and if they proved their loyalty, he'd buy a house for their mother. That's the only objective these kids had. They'd say 'I don't care if they make Swiss cheese or mincemeat out of me. So long as I get my mum a little house, I can die happy.' And Pablo made it happen.

"Another reason Pablo's sicarios were so loyal is that they always worked in teams of two, usually with their best friends, and the deal was if your partner screwed up, you gotta kill him.

"Say you and me are partners in Pablo's gang and one day I say to you, 'See that house over there. The cartel's got half a tonne of coke stashed in there. Let's go steal it. We can make a lot of money and they'll never suspect us'. Then you would say to me, 'Wilson, are you out of your frigin' mind? If they find out what happened, I'm gonna have to kill you'. And I'd say, 'Ian, you're right. Sorry, the greed just took over'. That's how Pablo kept his sicarios in line."

Montesacro Cemetery is set on a hill by a freeway carpeted in grass and spotted with tombstones. The place couldn't be more serene, though one night about six months ago that serenity was broken when a sicario walked into the funeral hall and riddled a coffin with bullets.

"Pablo would tell his enemies, 'I'm going to unbury your grandmother from her grave and shoot her so you'll have to bury her again,'" Wilson says. "It's the ultimate insult, so whoever that guy was in that coffin they shot up must've done something really bad. If that happened in the US or your country Australia, the cops would take the body and do a ballistics test to find out who did it. But here, no one cares. The family just bought a new coffin and the funeral went ahead as planned as if nothing had happened."

We stroll over to a spot where Escobar is buried alongside his parents, his beloved nanny and Alberto De Jesus Agudelo, AKA 'Limón'. In the *Narcos* series, Limón was a random taxi driver Pablo meets and recruits as a sicario, but Wilson says that's malarky. "Limón and Pablo were childhood friends but Limón was never a sicario," he says. "He was the family driver and later he became the dispatcher for a taxi company Pablo owned in Medellin. The taxi drivers were Pablo's eyes and ears on the streets. They all had CB radios back then, and Limón would say to them, 'Guys, any cops out there?' When one of those drivers saw a roadblock, they would call in and tell Limón and Limón would relay the message to Pablo's radio. That's how he managed to stay on the run right under the cops' noses for 10 years in Medellin."

"PABLO WOULD TELL HIS ENEMIES, 'I'M GOING TO UNBURY YOUR GRANDMOTHER FROM HER GRAVE AND SHOOT HER SO YOU'LL HAVE TO BURY HER AGAIN'."

Before we leave, Wilson tells me tourists often ask him if it's OK to smoke a joint or do a line of cocaine on Escobar's grave. "I tell them 'do whatever you want, but if you get arrested don't come crying to me'. Last year [US rap artist] Wiz Khalifa came here for a concert and posted a couple of photo on Instagram of him laying flowers on Pablo's grave and smoking a joint. Crazy, right?"

Medellin's conservative Mayor Federico Gutiérrez was not impressed. He called Khalifa "shameless" for "advocating crime", adding that the rapper should have laid flowers on the tombstones of Escobar's victims instead.

FIVE-STAR PRISON

In 1989, Escobar ordered the assassination of Luis Carlos Galán, a presidential candidate who'd declared himself public enemy number one of Colombia's drug cartels and denounced Escobar as a mafioso at a political rally. For the Government of Colombia, Galán's murder was the straw that broke the camel's back, and they redoubled their efforts to take down the kingpin. Under escalating pressure, Escobar opted to surrender in 1991 and serve five years in prison – but with an extraordinary caveat. Instead of going to a super-max prison in the capital Bogata, Escobar would convert an abandoned drug rehabilitation clinic on a forested plateau overlooking Medellín into a private prison and serve his time there.

La Catedral (The Cathedral), as the site was called, was no ordinary penitentiary. Yes, it had a watchtower, electric fence and armed guards. But they were all Escobar's sicarios, and their job was not to stop their boss from escaping but to stop the police and journalists from getting in.

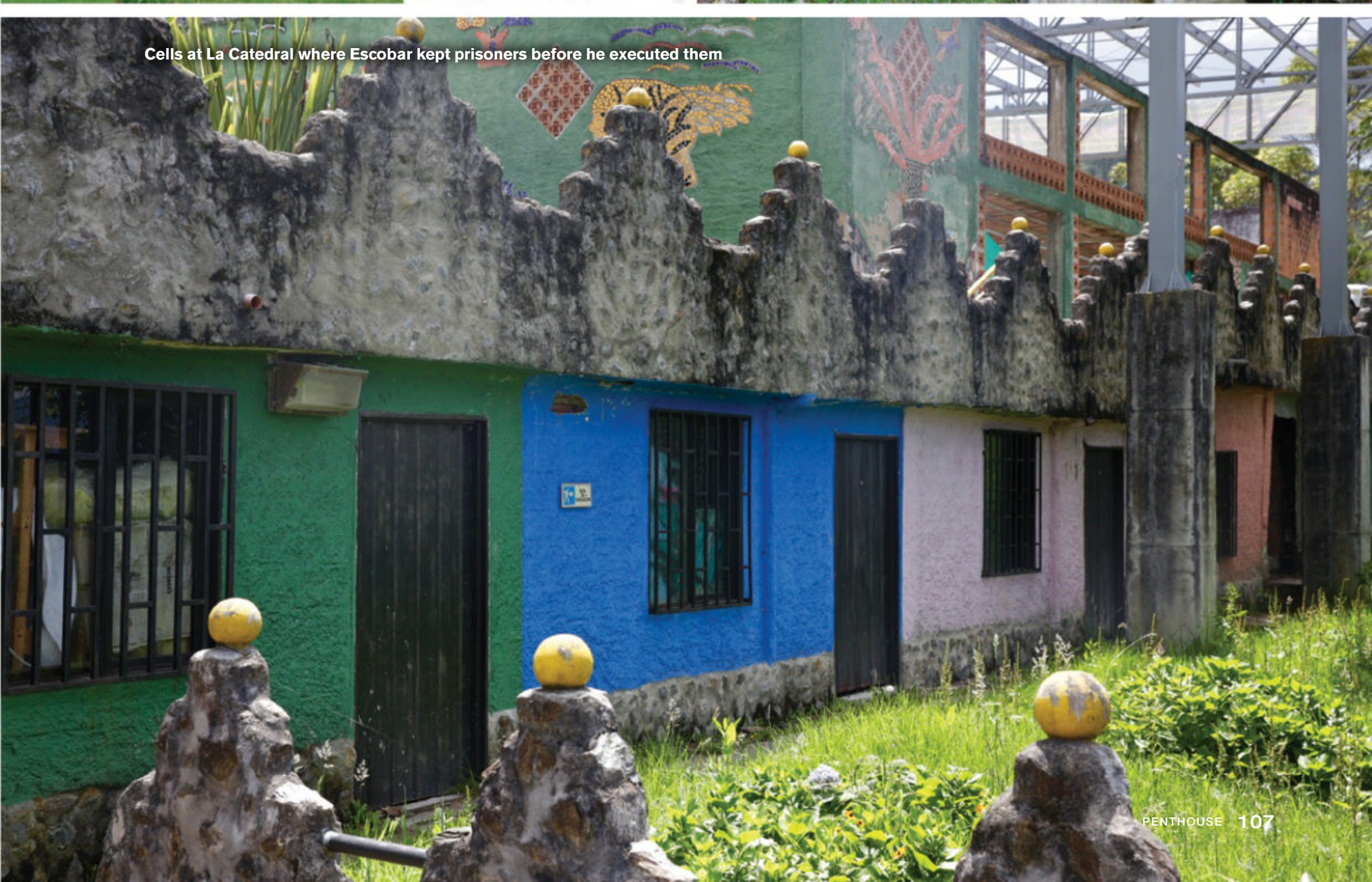
La Catedral also had some very unusual amenities: a soccer field, jacuzzis, pool tables, a nightclub and casino where concerts and orgies were held, an armoury full of guns, a giant dollhouse for Escobar's daughter when she visited and a waterfall where Escobar sourced his drinking water as he believed the Colombian government was secretly trying to poison him.

It takes us an hour to drive up the steep and winding road that climbs 15 kilometres from the centre of Medellin to La Catedral. Surrounded by jungle and enveloped by mist for more than 12 hours each day, it occupies a strategically superior position and is very hard to bomb or raid. At the time of Escobar's incarceration, the closest police outpost was three kilometres downhill. After showing me the old casino and nightclub, Wilson points out a row of cells – a prison-within-a-prison where Escobar held and tortured anyone he thought had crossed him. Moments later, another guide walks by and tells a group of American tourists the cells were the sleeping quarters of Escobar's sicarios. The incident makes me doubt the veracity of everything I'm hearing. A few months prior to my visit, a priest who now runs a retirement home at La Catedral told the *New Yorker* magazine most of the narco guides who come here tell tourists "anything that comes into their heads".

But Wilson stands his ground. "There are hundreds of stories about Escobar and because he was such a unique character, anything is possible. But I only share what I know and most of what I know I learned directly from Popeye," he says, referring to Jhon Jairo Velásquez Vásquez, an Escobar sicario who served 23 years in prison, who was released in 2014 but re-imprisoned in

View of Medellin from La Catedral

A cubby house Escobar built for his daughter at La Catedral



Cells at La Catedral where Escobar kept prisoners before he executed them

Pablo Escobar Autopsy photos

Escobar's old home now in ruins

May for extortion and conspiracy.

"Popeye was a stone-cold killer, but the guy really made me laugh. Until he got rearrested he was also doing tours, charging US$200 per head. The Mexican tourists loved Popeye. He's a great guy to have a beer with. But he's crazy, man. All he had to do was give one tour a week and he could've lived like a king in Medellin. But he just couldn't stay out of the game, just like Pablo couldn't when he lived up here. All Pablo had to do was five years in the lap of luxury, but the thought of his rivals taking over his territory was too much for him to bear.

"So one day, Pablo sends his men to rip off Gerardo Moncada, one of his closest and oldest friends. Pablo left Moncada in charge of the Medellin cartel, but Moncada had started to pull towards a rival cartel from the city of Cali. So Pablo's goons find Moncada's accountant, tie him up, torture him and make him reveal the location of Moncada's cash. They found US$23 million. Now Moncada wasn't too happy about that. So he comes up here and says, 'Pablo' – he was one of the few people who called him Pablo, everyone else called him *patron* (boss), that's how close they were – 'Pablo, where's my frigin' money. I know you took it.' Now Popeye didn't like the tone of Moncada's voice too much so he pulls out a pistola and blows Moncada's brains out. Moncada brought his partner Fernando Galeano up with him and Popeye killed him too.

"The next day, the headlines in the newspapers in Medellin read, 'Two men murdered at La Catedral'. The CIA starts pressuring the Colombian Government, saying what the hell is happening with Pablo? He's coming and going from prison whenever he wants, still killing people and still trafficking drugs.

"At first, the Colombians resisted, saying Pablo had stopped putting bombs all over the place and people can breathe again. So who cares if a couple of narcos got killed? But the Americans persisted and in July 1992, a year into Pablo's five-year sentence, the Colombians decide to raid La Catedral and put him in a real prison. But Pablo escaped.

"In *Narcos*, Pablo is nearly caught during the raid when he stumbles upon a group of policemen. But they're so scared of him that they let him go even though he's unarmed and they've got machine guns. Now that never happened. Pablo got wind of the raid through policemen on his payroll and just walked out of here with 10 of his men. When the police finally raided the place, Pablo had already been gone for a day and half."

MOUNTAIN OF SHIT

On December 2, 1993, nearly a year and a half after his escape from La Catedral, Escobar was killed in a shootout with police while hiding out with Limón in the Medellin suburb of Los Olivos.

"Pablo knew it was over," Wilson tells me as we stand outside the nondescript double-storey home where Escobar met his end. "His entire organisation was devastated. Any of his sicarios who weren't already dead or in jail were snitching to the Americans."

No one knows exactly who fired the fatal bullet that entered Escobar's right ear and ended his life. But according to Escobar's son Juan Pablo, whose personal slogan is 'I inherited a mountain of shit', the wound was self-inflicted. "I have no doubt my father took his own life," Juan Pablo wrote in his 2014 biography *Pablo Escobar: My Father*. Wilson concurs: "I believe what happened is what he told his family he would always do. Pablo said he would rather be in a grave in Colombia than be extradited to a prison in the US, and that if the day ever came when his enemies cornered him, he'd shoot himself in the right ear."

"PABLO SAID HE WOULD RATHER BE IN A GRAVE IN COLOMBIA THAN A PRISON IN THE US, AND IF HIS ENEMIES CORNERED HIM, HE'D SHOOT HIMSELF IN THE RIGHT EAR."

The last stop on the tour is Escobar's last official place of residence before he became an outlaw in 1983. The Monaco Building as it's called is an eight-storey pleasure palace with a tennis court, holding cells and an Olympic-size pool. There was another pool on the top floor where Escobar's wife, children, nanny and mother continued to live until the Cali cartel detonated an 80kg car bomb at the front gate in 1988.

Until recently, narco-guides were able to take tourists inside. But Mayor Gutiérrez recently put a stop to it as part of his crusade to de-romanticise all things Escobar. On September 19, the very same day of my tour, police shut down a small narco museum run by Escobar's brother and former numbers man Roberto, allegedly because it did not have a tourism licence. Six days later, local newspaper *El Tiempo* reported Mayor Gutiérrez's long-standing crusade to have the Monaco Building demolished and replaced with a memorial park in honour of Escobar's victims had finally been green-lit.

Wilson reckons the mayor's idea is ill-conceived: "It's not that I don't feel for the victims, but it's going to cost the city a lot of money to maintain a park here. They're going to have to place 24-hour security here because a tonne of people are going to want to smoke joints and do coke at Pablo's old pad".

He reckons the Monaco Building should be converted into a five-star hotel instead. "Do you have any idea how much tourists would be willing to pay to stay in Pablo's old penthouse and live like a drug kingpin for the weekend? If I were in charge, I'd have armed guards with machine guns pick them up from the airport and use the profits to help Escobar's victims or treat drug addiction.

"This trip our mayor is on now, telling people what they can't do, it'll never work because the more you tell people not to do something, the more they want to do it. There's an aura about Pablo that intrigues people – not because they want to be drug traffickers and kill people but because everyone dreams about being a billionaire, having beautiful women and beautiful cars. Thousands of people come to Medellin each month to do these tours, and once they've ticked that box they realise there's a lot more to this city, starting with the weather: it's always spring here. It's such a scenic and beautiful place.

"So to all those do-gooders who want us to stop these tours, my advice to them is to drive up to La Catedral and read the last line of the billboard the frigin' Colombian government put up there: "He who does not know his history is condemned to repeat it." Yet how much of that history is actually true? No more than 50 percent, I reckon. It's bullshit, but good fun.

PAUL ANTHONY
paulanthonylabel.com

WEIRD HISTORY

A GIFT FROM HITLER

HOW INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS SAVED TWO NAZIS FROM CERTAIN DEATH.

BY SEAN BRUCE

WITH all the talk in the news about the looming Nazi threat taking hold in Australia, we thought it a good opportunity to look at a time where there were actual Nazis in Australia. Not Nazi sympathisers or Neo-Nazis, or even members of the short-lived Australian Nationalist Socialist Party (which had a brief public profile in the 70s).

The Nazis in this story are from the then nascent-Nazi Germany. They would go on to become members of Hitler's Third Reich, and in 1932, still six years before war broke out in Europe, they briefly – and by pure mishap – ended up stranded in a remote Aboriginal community in north Western Australia.

Their names were Hans Bertram and Adolph Klausmann, two German aviators traversing the world seeking new markets for the burgeoning German aviation industry. While Hitler was consolidating his power in their homeland, Bertram and Klausmann were piloting the *Atlantis*, a Junkers W33 seaplane, through Europe, the Middle-East and Asia.

Ten weeks into their journey, the pair landed in Indonesia to refuel and overhaul their engines. After splitting off from other members in their entourage, they flew south-east towards Australia, with plans to rendezvous at a later date in Shanghai.

What ensued was a catastrophic series of events that would become one of the greatest survival stories in Australian history.

The duo encountered rough storms over the Timor Sea, forcing them to land in Kimberley in north Western Australia. With no Wi-Fi, no GPS, no telephones or satellites, Klausmann and Bertram were hopelessly lost, and their seaplane desperately low on fuel. To compound their problems, the German duo incorrectly calculated their location, believing themselves to be on Melville Island, slightly north-east of Darwin, when in fact they were already 370 kilometres *west* of Darwin and very much on mainland Australia.

Only one day into the ordeal, after deciding to fly further west, the *Atlantis* ran out of fuel. The two left the seaplane and trekked by foot back to their initial landing spot. Beating off swarms of flies and mosquitos, and narrowly escaping encounters with crocodiles, the pair traversed the dry bush and desert; shirtless, shoeless and without food or water.

Seven days in, after being bested by the brutal climate and relentless onslaught of insects and animals, Klausmann and Bertram begrudgingly returned to their (incredibly useless) seaplane.

In a last-ditch attempt to save themselves, the waylaid Krauts transformed one of the seaplane's floats into a makeshift kayak they could use to probe the area for signs of civilisation.

But after four days of journeying by kayak, they found nothing, and finally came to the crushing (yet very fucking obvious) realisation that they were not on Melville Island. Eventually, the makeshift seaplane-float kayak gave out, forcing the duo to take shelter in a cave near Cape Bernier. Here, they would sit out the remainder of the ordeal before eventually being stumbled upon by a local group of Aboriginals. *

It's said that the local indigenous mob brought them freshly caught fish, chewed it and fed them until the men regained enough strength to walk. (If coloured folks chewing food and spitting it into the mouths of Nazis like helpless baby birds isn't poetry then we don't know what is).

All in all, the duo lasted 39 days. Klausmann was driven mad by the experience and never fully recovered (funny that), while Bertram wrote books and directed films about the experience, and went on to join the Brownshirts and make propaganda films for the Nazi Party.

Weirdly, as thanks to the local people, and on behalf of Hitler himself, the German consulate in Australia donated a pipe organ to the Aboriginal mission in Kalumburu.

The organ is still around today, in storage in a Benedictine monastery in New Norcia; though a little worse for wear. In another strange tale, it was shot up by a strafing Japanese fighter plane 11 years later. During the Second World War, a wing of 36 Japanese planes raided the local Kalumburu mission, mistaking it for a weapons silo, killing four children, a woman and a priest – and damaging Hitler's gift in the attack.

Though the feted Nazi uprising that mainstream media in this country would have you believe is currently underway might be a different brand from what went down in Kalumburu in the 30s, let this story serve as a reminder that whether it's your shirt or your skin that is proudly brown, history is, sometimes, really fucking weird.

*Fun fact: This is the only time in recorded history that a Nazi was actually happy to see a black person.

OPINION

WHY RIGHT-WING GIRLS ARE BETTER GIRLFRIENDS

THEY'RE HOTTER, THEY'RE SMARTER AND THEY DON'T HATE MEN. SO WHY AREN'T YOU DATING ONE? **BY DAISY COUSENS**

IN modern dating, everyone is disposable. The process of courting is now a parade of sloppy hook-ups and bruised egos. And while I know you guys find a string of filthy one-nighters a whole lot of fun, eventually a fella is going to want to settle down. But in today's world of culturally condoned misandry, where do you start?

Everywhere you look, angry feminists are shrieking about "male privilege" and "toxic masculinity". You can't smile absent-mindedly at a woman without being accused of sexual harassment. As for telling a lady she looks nice – forget it. You're objectifying her and perpetuating something called "rape culture". It seems everything you instinctively want to do to make women feel good is wrong, rude or threatening.

So where do you find a well-adjusted lady, who is as much CEO material as wife material? Where are all the smart, confident women, with clear-cut career goals, who are also happy to pop out a couple of kids? Well, you won't find them in gender studies departments, or donning pussyhats. If you want a girl who's a package deal, ditch those leftist-feminazis and try your luck with an empowered, freedom-focussed, right-wing glamour girl.

"Whoa!" I hear you exclaim. "Aren't they all religious nuts, and aren't there only, like, five of them?" Hell, no. You just don't hear from us that much, because we can't be bothered dealing with the cry-screaming of left-feminists when they realise we've broken ranks. There are plenty of us, and we do life better than leftie ladies. So you should be dating us. Exclusively.

Why are we better? First, we're demonstrably hotter. A 2017 study in the *Journal of Public Economics* found conservatives in Australia, Europe and the US are generally better looking than lefties. A 2012 survey from UCLA garnered similar results. And for anecdotal proof, a comparison of the women on Fox News versus CNN will do just fine. Our inherent hotness comes from the fact we're not ashamed of being female, thus not ashamed of being feminine.

Right-wing women don't equate femininity with inferiority. We love being women, and see ourselves as different but equal to men. We know if you wear pink, exercise and maintain perfect make-up, you don't lose your Woman Card. Femininity and masculinity complement each other, so we're OK with you being men. Unlike left-feminists, we don't inherently hate you, or think your masculine tendencies are "toxic". As such, we'll always accept you, rather than insisting you capitulate to the behaviour feminism prescribes for men.

Speaking of masculinity, we know the kind of primal kick you get out of providing for your lady. We're also aware of how rude it is to de-ball you in the process. You want to pick up the bill? If that makes you feel manly, go ahead. However, we're capitalists. We don't expect regular handouts. So we'll make a mental note to shout you next time, with our own hard-earned money. All the while enjoying the big, goofy grin you guys get when you realise you've impressed us, of course.

Along with being prettier, and better company, we're also better at sex. According to a 2016 YouGov survey, the further right you lean, the more sexually satisfied you are. This is because, funnily enough, a more conservative, traditionalist attitude to intercourse actually leads to superior sex. Traditionalism doesn't mean we're all good little Christian virgins. We're just cluey enough to realise that, for women, random hook-ups are usually awkward, painful and devoid of orgasm. So what's the point?

"WHOAH!" I HEAR YOU EXCLAIM. "AREN'T THEY ALL RELIGIOUS NUTS, AND AREN'T THERE ONLY, LIKE, FIVE OF THEM?"

Instead, we'd rather practice (intensively) on one person for an extended period of time. Favouring monogamous relationships over hedonistic promiscuity makes us more comfortable trying new (and kinkier) things. You could even argue because we see sexual partners as valuable, not disposable, we're less likely to cheat. And let's be honest: having fewer sexual partners means less risk of contracting an STI. Handy, right?

So if you want a girlfriend whose idea of empowerment is wallowing in victimhood, by all means, join your local socialist club. But if you want a woman who is empowered and career-driven, also family-oriented, hot, sexually savvy, and will love you wholeheartedly for all the things that make you a man, take a sharp right turn, and keep heading in that luscious direction.

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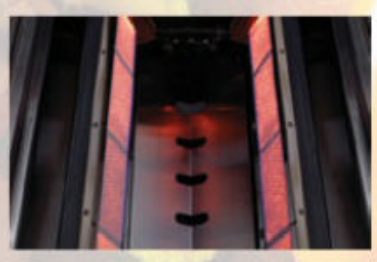

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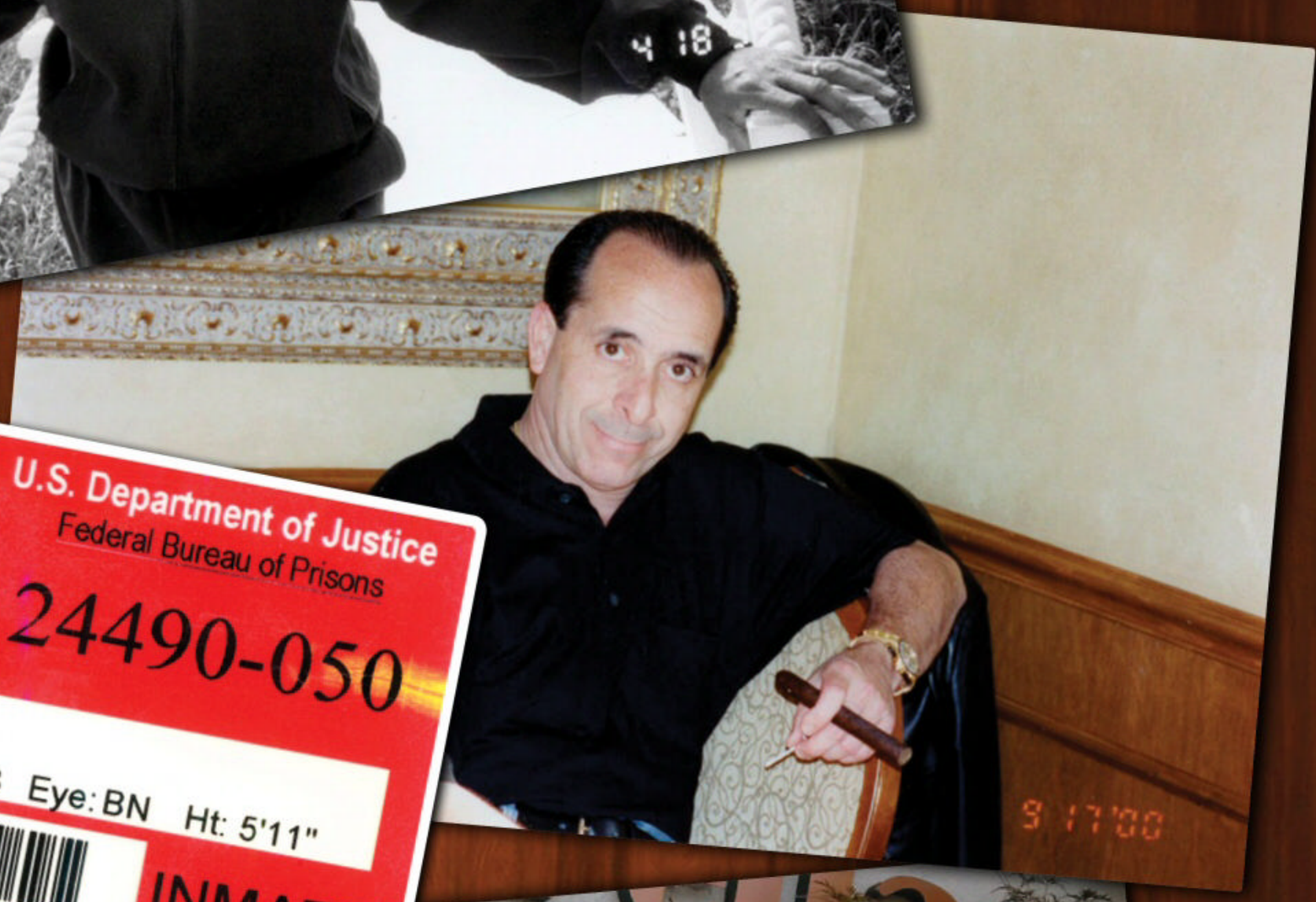

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Q & A

KING CON

ONE MAN'S CROOKED STORY OF CRIME, CORRUPTION AND CONNING THE BIG BOYS. **BY SETH FERRANTI**

TOM Giacomaro grew up in a typical Italian home in the 50s, where Mum stayed home all day and Dad went to work as an accountant. He began stealing at six years old and at the age of 10, he formed his own little gang of thieves. As a teen, he started a high school fraternity – which was really a gang – similar to what the Bloods and the Crips are today. The clique would steal car radios and sell drugs under Giacomaro's direction. He got in with mob bigwigs like Whitey Bulger and Jimmy Hoffa as he served his apprenticeship in crime but found his true calling in investment fraud.

Giacomaro figures US$3 billion went through his hands over a 30-year period. His shady dealings led to Philly mob boss Nicky Scarfo wanting him dead. Eventually Giacomaro was busted and pled guilty to mail fraud and conspiracy. Serving 12 straight years in federal prison for a lifetime of crime. His new book, *The King of Con: How a Smooth-Talking Jersey Boy Made and Lost Billions, Baffled the FBI, Eluded the Mob, and Lived to Tell the Crooked Tale*, tells Giacomaro's story for the first-time. We caught up with him to find out if his tale is more *Catch Me If You Can* than *Goodfellas*, what it was like to rip off the mafia and how he survived a mafia hit.

Is your story more *Catch Me If You Can* than *Goodfellas*?

I think it's a combination – a mix of a high, sophisticated, in-depth, detailed, corporate – kind of a *Catch Me If You Can* corporate thievery – taking from the big boys, stock manipulation, mergers and acquisitions… along with an organised crime flare. The industries I targeted happened to be mob-tainted: trucking, garbage, warehousing, distribution – so the mob got dragged into it. Because of my skills in manipulation, I was able to manipulate the mob to be able to take over those industries where a normal person couldn't because they didn't have those connections. Yes, I was like a young Henry Hill at the beginning.

He was a maneuverer, a shaker – he added a certain flare and ambiance to the organised crime world. His god was money. He spun whatever he had to spin for the dollar, and I did the same thing, but on a much bigger scale. We were grandiose compared to *Goodfellas*. I make Tony Soprano look like Mickey Mouse. I make Jordan Belfort from *Wolf of Wall Street* look like he stole a pocketbook. He did it one time with stock manipulation, over a one-year period. I did it from the late 70s through the 80s, 90s and 2000s for over three and a half decades. No comparison. What I did makes *Wolf of Wall Street* look like a pimple on an elephant's ass.

How and when did you start getting involved in crime and how quickly did your capers become serious?

I used to wait for my father to come home drunk after bowling on Thursday night or after cards on Friday night, and his wallet would be stuffed full. He'd have maybe $2000, $3000 in hundreds, in twenties – two inches of bills in there. He'd leave his wallet on top of the bookcase in the TV room, and I'd wait until he'd go to sleep and then sneak out of my bedroom and take money out of his wallet. I'd take a couple of hundred. When I got a job at the A&P to work the cash register, my

IT WAS THE DISCO ERA AND EVERYBODY WAS SITTING AROUND THE TABLE AT REGINE'S AND STUDIO 54 SNORTING COCAINE.

fraternity guys would come in and pull steaks, chopped meat and all the most expensive stuff. I'd run it through the cash register, and they'd get a bill for about $2.00.

There were no computers taking inventories of barcodes off of the items. In the back, I opened the door and my guys would pull up with their cars, and we'd pull all the best meat and take it down to the Paterson Markets and sell it the next day. It was a mini-mob. Years later, when I was a salesman in the trucking industry, I went from pot to cocaine. It was the disco era in the late 70s to early 80s and everybody was sitting around the table at Regine's and Studio 54 snorting cocaine. Not only were we snorting at those restaurants and clubs in New York, but we were selling it. It became a multi-million dollar cocaine business. What evolved from small-time crime became one of the most massive drug businesses in North Jersey.

How did you get involved with Whitey Bulger and Jimmy Hoffa?

Both of those connections came about when I worked at Maislin Transport, right after high school. I was their gopher

– I'd "go for this, and go for that," as Mr. Maislin used to say. Jimmy Hoffa used to fly in to meet Mr. Alex, the owner, and I picked him up at the airport with Mr. Alex's Triple X Cadillac. Maislin would take liquor off route, which they were not allowed to do. Coming from Canada, it was supposed to go straight into Albany, New York and then down to Rutherford, New Jersey and certain trucks would be diverted or shipped to Boston. To get into Boston, certain kickbacks had to be paid. On a monthly basis, money had to be paid to both Whitey Bulger and Jimmy Hoffa.

I would take briefcases of money to them. I never knew how much money was in the briefcases. It was a Samsonite, black briefcase with combination locks on both sides. I'd fly to Boston and Detroit with them and back in a day. There were no security checks, no x-ray machines – you just got on the plane. I would fly into Detroit or Boston in the morning, deliver the briefcase and fly back up in the afternoon. It was just like being a courier. Whitey Bulger had tremendously big fingers, big hands and big thick wrists. When I first met Hoffa, I was driving him back to the airport and he said to me, "You're going to go far in this business. You're going to be big."

What benefits did you get in the criminal underworld from being associated with mobsters?

We were able to get into companies that normal people would never be able to get into. I was able to get into the trucking industry, warehousing and distribution and garbage industry, where people would not talk to any "civilians" unless you were connected with a particular organised crime family and somebody blessed you to be able to go in. Someone would have to call that owner and say, "Tom Giacomaro's okay". I had to get "The Chin's" (Vincent Gigante) blessing before I went into the garbage business.

What's a con man's best attribute in your opinion?

The ability to talk to an individual and look them in the eyes and also watch their body language, watch their hand movements and watch their eyes. You have to be able to look directly into their eyes when you talk to them and tell them what they want to hear. *You're going to take them to the promised land*. You're going to give them *riches that they've never had before*. You're going to tell them all those things they want to hear. Things that they can't attain themselves.

Talk about the hit Nicky Scarfo put on you and why he wanted you dead.

Nicky Scarfo wanted me dead because of my association with certain businessmen whom he was involved with who felt I wasn't paying enough or doing my job properly and therefore jeopardising the enterprise. I'm mobbed up the ass. I'm rumbling with the New Jersey Genovese guys, I'm rumbling in Brooklyn with the Bonanno crime family. I'm fucking drunk. I'm doing like 60, 65, white van right on my ass, almost banging my rear end. I pull to the right into the centre lane, I come out of the fast lane, and the motherfucker pulls alongside of me. I see three guys, they're goons. One's got a fucking shotgun, he's trying to get in the kneeling position. The other guys got a .357 in his hand, and he's trying to hold the door open and the third guy starts shooting at the side of the car.

I take the fucking Mercedes, I'm in the centre lane and I slam it into the side of their car. And bang, they all go flying. They all go flying. The gun goes up. Want to talk about sobering up? They hit the back right corner of my car, it caused me to go into a spin. I start going sideways into a spin, I hit the fucking guardrail, my airbag opens, I get pinned against the driver's seat and I'm going straight down into the Passaic River. I thought I was underwater for fucking 20 minutes, I'm in 11 feet of fucking water. I pop out of the water, I look at all the people, there're hundreds of people on the riverbank, both from the top of the bridge where I went off and on the bottom riverbank. They're going yeah, I said, fucking yeah? Fucking help.

You had no problem ripping off mafiasos, explain your thinking?

We ripped off the mafia because the mafia's not involved in your day-to-day operations of your legitimate businesses, so they don't really know how much money you're making – or taking. You pay a weekly "vig", it's called – weekly kickbacks to certain key people in organised crime to allow you in those businesses. But you rip them off by not giving them increases as your businesses grow. You're not giving them their fair share.

Why did you decide to write a book about your story?

I thought about writing a book non-stop while I was in jail. I was going to write a book prior to going to jail called *Sophisticated Thief* and one of my investors, Mary Higgins Clark, later took that title and wrote *Christmas Thief* with a character based on me. I look at what's going on in society and politics today – with guys like Paul Manafort and Michael Cohen, Kelly – and I look at the mortgage brokers in the 90s, the investment bankers in the 00s, and it's what I was doing for the past five decades.

WE HAD OVER 117 BANK ACCOUNTS NOT ONLY IN THE UNITED STATES, BUT ALL OVER THE WORLD TO LAUNDER MONEY.

We had over 117 bank accounts that were established not only in the United States, but all over the world to launder money. This stuff is not new to me, what's going on today. I don't know how Manafort thought he'd get away with it today, he was stupid. There's a whole paper trail now. Back in the day, you could get away with it, the only thing that got tracked were deposits over $10,000. Today, you can't even go to open a bank account unless you go with utility bills and phone records and corporate accounts. You can't do this shit now. But I also know that America loves a con man.

And everybody's conning America, whether it's Donald Trump – who conned his base to get elected – or whether it's Kellyanne Conway, or the senators or the Speaker of the House. The con just continues to go on. This book is about more than crime or the mob or con men, though. I also looked at the mass shootings going on in high schools and the #MeToo movement and thought about what created all of this. I looked back at my own life – the bullying, my father, how I treated women – and I think it's important that people see what happens to a kid, and how crime and criminals are developed.

GET
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OPINION

POINTLESS WASTE OF (QUESTION) TIME

PREENING POLLIES YELLING BACK AND FORTH SERVES NO PURPOSE IN OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM. WE SHOULD SCRAP THE CONCEPT ENTIRELY. BY BEN POBJIE

THE modern political landscape is a barren, blasted plain, littered with the debris and detritus of shattered dreams, broken hearts and disembowelled principles. As we gaze upon the grotesque rabble of talentless time-servers, jaded grifters and ideological kidney blockages that make up Australia's political class, we realise that we have no real hope. Democracy is a sham, our representatives don't actually represent us, and the only way a better future awaits us is via bloody revolution or the Second Coming of Christ. But if we can't make politics work for us, we may still hold out hope that we can stop it actively insulting us, and the first step in that process is a simple one: abolish *Question Time*.

Oh no, cry the True Believers In Democracy, from inside the bizarre bubble they live in which remains impervious to reality. *We can't get rid of Question Time! That would deny the People a vital means of holding the government to account!* I don't blame the True Believers for saying this. It's not their fault. It's just that they have clearly never in their lives watched a single second of Question Time and are therefore utterly ignorant about what it involves. I have watched it. I have faced the horror. It's like looking straight into Sauron's Eye.

It is fairly obvious that Dorothy Dixers are dreadful, and one of the cute things about Australian politics is the way that 100 percent of people can agree that something is dreadful while also agreeing to do nothing about it. But a lot of us fall into the trap of assuming that the other kind of question, the question from the Opposition, is the "good" bit of Question Time. Here's where the government gets its feet held to the fire, right? Here's where we see hypocrisy and corruption exposed?

THE FACT THAT QUESTION TIME IS SEEN AS A MEANS OF HOLDING THE GOVERNMENT TO ACCOUNT IS A BIG PART OF THE PROBLEM.

The fact that Question Time is seen as a means of holding the government to account is a big part of the problem. It's like *Q&A*, which claims to be giving the people a voice but is actually just a slightly more refined version of cage-fighting. Unlike *Q&A*, however, Question Time lacks even the cold comfort of entertainment, because Parliament is populated almost entirely by people who chose their current career path due to their total lack of wit and charisma.

There are really only two problems with Question Time. The first problem is the questions. The second problem is the answers. Let's take them one at a time.

First, the questions. These are also divided into two categories: questions to ministers from the Opposition and questions to ministers from their own party colleagues. The latter are known as "Dorothy Dixers", in honour of Dame Dorothy Dix, the first woman to ever insult the intelligence of an entire country. They are always couched in the language of "informing the house", as if the purpose of asking your own side a question is to make sure everyone in parliament is up to date on the latest developments. You know, because when you're an MP, there's just no way of knowing what the government's up to unless a backbencher reads out a poorly phrased question in a stilted manner.

The fact that these questions are not, in any way, intended to "inform the house" is made clear when you hear them. Every single one of them takes the same rough form: "Could the Minister update the house on the ways that the government is making all Australians rich and happy and creating an earthly paradise that shall endure for the next thousand years? Is the Minister aware of any other approaches that would result in us all being literally murdered tomorrow?" They vary according to the portfolio of the minister being quizzed, but they always adhere to this formula: in a nutshell, "Tell us why we're awesome and the other side sucks balls".

Yeah, nah. The Opposition *could* use Question Time to press the government on meaningful issues in meaningful ways, but it's a proud tradition that they never do. This is because the Opposition uses Question Time not to perform the task of holding power to account, but to perform the task of impressing their buddies. So, for example, while a public-spirited Opposition MP might ask, "Given that the Minister told the House that he had had no conversations with the CEO of EvilCorp, what is his explanation for this email thread which has been confirmed as originating in his office?"; an actual Opposition MP will ask, "Given that the Minister is a big fat liar, doesn't he agree that resigning immediately is the only way to not be a total bastard?" And all the Opposition benches cheer loudly, but nothing is achieved, because the question is so obviously hostile that the Minister can easily respond to it with equivalent hostility. Dodging questions

QUESTION TIME DOESN'T SERVE ANY PURPOSE: EVEN IF ANYONE WATCHED IT BESIDES POLITICAL STAFFERS AND LONELY WONKS, THEY WOULDN'T BE ENLIGHTENED ON ANY IMPORTANT SUBJECT.

persistently might make a Minister look bad: answering open insults with open insults just makes both sides look as crappy as each other. Which suits the government just fine.

That's the other problem, as I mentioned: the answers. The government answers questions from its own side in the same way every time: by attacking the Opposition. The government answers questions from the Opposition in the same way every time: by attacking the Opposition. Ask Scott Morrison why Malcolm Turnbull was deposed, and he will yell about Labor being controlled by unions. Ask Peter Dutton about conditions on Nauru, and he will yell about Labor drowning people at sea. Ask Mathias Cormann about dividend imputation, and he will yell about Labor wanting to sell your kids heroin. There is literally no way to ask a question during Question Time that won't result in a Minister's bright red face screaming about how awful Labor is. Don't take this as a partisan view: when Labor gets into power the rants about the LNP will be just as loud, just as red-faced and just as irrelevant.

There are ways we could improve Question Time, of course. We could abolish Dorothy Dixers. We could change the ridiculous rules that, for example, bans any MP calling another MP a "liar" even when the fact that they told a lie is a matter of undisputed public record. We could even appoint an independent Speaker, rather than letting proceedings be controlled by a member of the ruling party – an arrangement that is so obviously stupid nobody ever brings it up. But really, why bother improving Question Time when the biggest improvement would simply be to scrap it?

Question Time doesn't serve any purpose: even if anyone watched it besides political staffers and lonely wonks, they wouldn't be enlightened on any important subject. No government has ever been forced into retreat or a change of direction by the damp squibs lobbed at it by the Opposition in QT. No Minister has ever been genuinely pressured by a question in the chamber. If the government needs to get its message out, it already has a vast range of means by which to do so: it doesn't need the Member for Nowhere South stumbling over his lines to give it an opening. If the Opposition needs to expose the government's misdeeds, it's got plenty of opportunities to do so, too, without having to engage in this clumsy pantomime. Abolishing Question Time will rid Australian politics of its most undignified public spectacle, provide more time for the parliament to do some actual work and make the whole business of politics just that little bit less blatantly hypocritical. There's just no downside. Time to do it now.

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VICES FROM THE SOUTH EAST

LUKE WILLIAMS *DOWN AND OUT IN PARADISE* | PARTY BUS LIFE | PENTHOUSE FORUM REJECTS | CLASSIC FLASHBACK

OPINION

DOWN AND OUT IN PARADISE

LUKE WILLIAMS ON DRUG ADDICTION, MENTAL HEALTH AND SLUMMING IT IN SOUTH EAST ASIA. **BY SEAN BRUCE.**

LUKE Williams, author of *Down and Out in Paradise*, doesn't seem too fond of the white men who visit South East Asia. There are a lot of "D-grade males", he tells me, whose only interest in the area is cheap sex and booze, and the availability of young women and men, who would otherwise be out of their league in their home countries.

But don't worry – he doesn't let himself off the hook either. His unwillingness to pull punches and call it as it lies is his strongest suit. It's what makes the tales he tells and the characters he describes within them so compellingly vivid.

Down and Out in Paradise is a memoir of Williams's personal journey, first escaping Australia where he was crippled by a methamphetamine addiction, and then plunging himself, in what he refers to as at least a partially psychotic state, into the steamy, and often seedy parts the countries around South East Asia. What follows is a series of vignettes, personal reflections on the state of his mental health and vivid micro-profiles of the eccentric, the nasty and the downright dangerous individuals he encounters along the way. Always told with startling honesty, Williams brings to life his misadventures with good humour and wit – and his knack for finding trouble means he's never short on a good yarn.

The title of your book is inspired by George Orwell's memoir Down and Out in Paris and London. Are you a fan?

I am a fan. One person who I worked with on this book was an author named Maria Hyland, who publishes as M. J. Hyland. An exercise she got me to do was to copy down the first chapters of books that she thought would help me, and long before the publisher decided on that title, she gave me *A Moveable Feast* to read, Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and *Down and Out in Paris and London*.

It was quite a coincidence that the publisher suggested that title in the end.

Orwell came from a wealthy family. His days spent slumming it were investigative rather than from genuine poverty. Why did you decide to live "down and out"?

I wanted to see how minimal I could live. Before I moved to Asia, I had been indulging myself in that addict's mentality of "more, more, more".

And even if I wasn't abusing drugs, it was always like I needed more. I needed to have a more successful career, I needed to have more things. I needed to have more status, and I wanted to, through meditation, to try and put that to bed by seeing how far I could push it by taking things away.

But then I ended up just going too far with that as well.

There was a while there where I thought I'd worked it out, and I was like, "Oh yeah, it's consumer culture, and it's the westernised individualized, this and that." But clearly, I didn't work shit out because I ended up in a fucking psych ward, regardless. I can't pretend I have any answers at all in that early stage. But that was the thinking at the time, was that I could just abstain, abstain, abstain in all areas of life and that would bring me fulfilment.

They say running away from your problems doesn't help. Can it?

Well, I quit drugs, so in that sense, it helped. I don't think my problems went away, but my attempt to run away from them was a fun ride. I can say that. It was quite an adventure, to try and run away, even if it didn't ultimately fix anything.

IT WAS QUITE AN ADVENTURE, TO TRY AND RUN AWAY, EVEN IF IT DIDN'T ULTIMATELY FIX ANYTHING.

Beyond the touristy backdrop of Thailand and Southeast Asia in general, you found yourself from the company of expats from all different walks of life. Outside of the nicer parts of tourist Southeast Asia, what are Westerners doing there?

Most of them are coming here to have sex. Apart from that, tourists who just go and do the backpacking staff. But most of them, at least the ones that I saw are here because of the availability of sex and the availability of cheap prostitution as well.

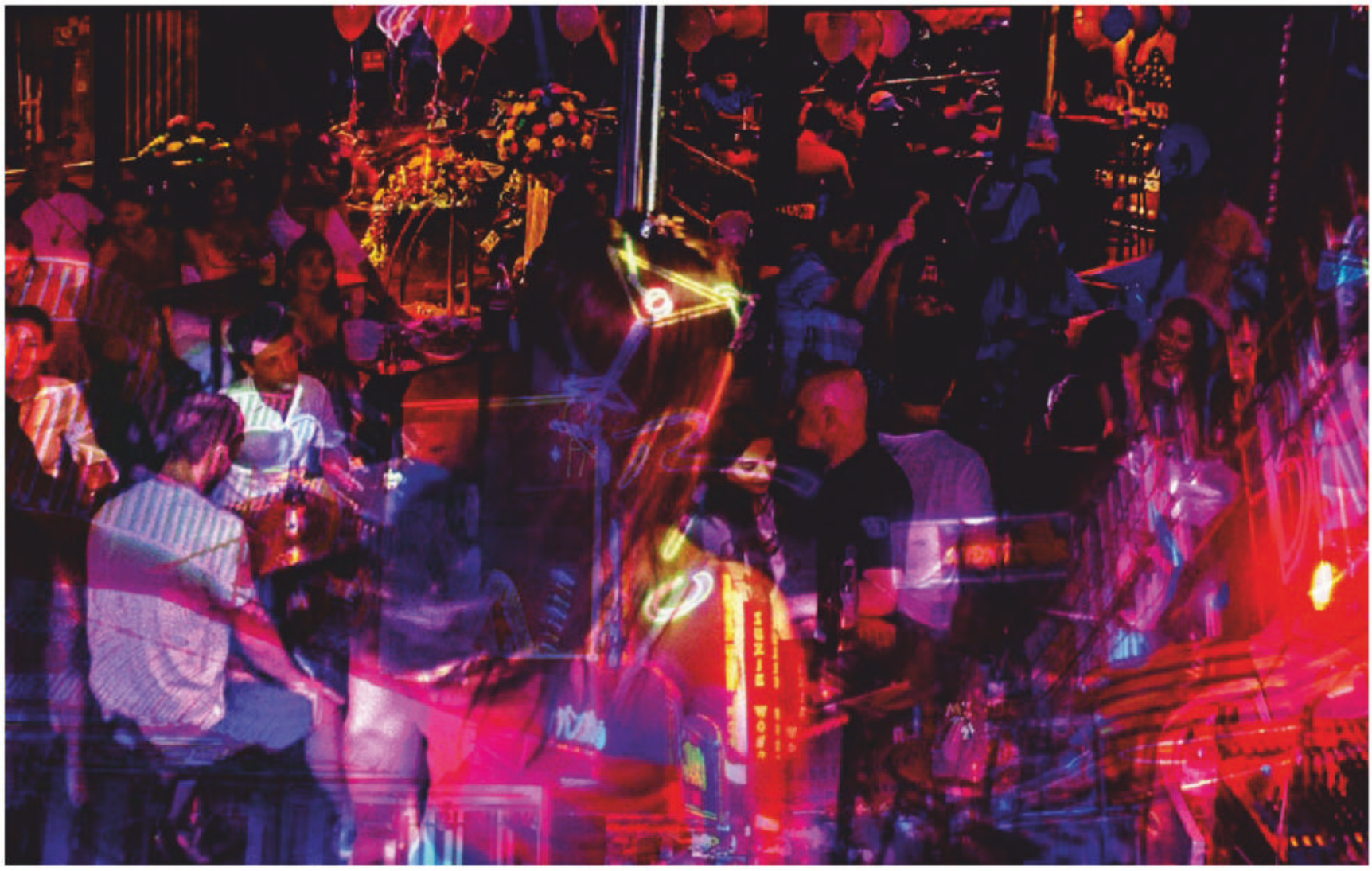
What's one place you never want to see again?

I will never go back to Angeles city in the Philippines. It's just a big shanty town with a road full of brothels in the middle of it. It's really sad. It was a very unpleasant place. The guys who go there are just fucking horrendous.

Describe your average tourists in that area.

I would say somebody who is an American, who served time in the army and was either dishonourably discharged or was

COW
Cow boy 2



EVEN IF I WASN'T ABUSING DRUGS, IT WAS ALWAYS LIKE I NEEDED MORE. I NEEDED TO HAVE A MORE SUCCESSFUL CAREER, I NEEDED TO HAVE MORE THINGS.

medically discharged, who watches one TV station only, and that would be Fox News, who is overweight to obese, who probably has got some sort of trauma that they've never dealt with, who sleeps till two o'clock in the afternoon every day and gets drunk within an hour of waking up. He is highly suspicious of strangers, and has had sex with countless prostitutes, and is really resentful about the fact that he fell in love with one.

A lot of the expats you meet in the book do seem quite…pathetic.

Well, there's definitely a lot of D-grade males around. I guess it's because it's so easy to get sex here, and because white skin is prized and because they've got a thing with having to show respect for older people. You see a lot of short, skinny men around, even younger guys – they're just D-grade men. They feel empowered here. I guess it's a good life in some ways if that's all you're looking for. If you're just some basic fucking loser, it's a good place to come.

You went to hell and back in paradise, what's one thing that you would have told yourself before you left?

Don't overestimate what life will be like because you've stopped using drugs. Because I used drugs for so long every day, not amphetamines every day, but when I wasn't using amphetamines, I was stoned. If I wasn't working, I'd be stoned from the minute I woke up to the minute I went to sleep. When I stopped using drugs, I went, "Ah-ha", that was the cause of all my problems; the fact that I used drugs, but it wasn't that at all. It obviously didn't help, but I think I overstated the extent to which drugs were making me unhappy when in fact, I think that was probably relieving some of my mental health symptoms in a lot of cases.

I never anticipated that I would deteriorate so much given that I'd stopped using drugs and given that I was taking medication and I was doing meditation and I was travelling around and trying these different things and exercising. I thought that meant I would be high mentally. I didn't realise I was as susceptible to poor mental health as what I obviously am.

There are a lot of low points in the book, not just for yourself, but for the people you encounter. Is there hope at the end of this journey?

Well, I'm back in Asia. I'm here trying to rebuild my life again because it just didn't work out for me in Australia. My parents kicked me out again, I'm always in and out of the hospital again, but I'm hopeful that I will find somewhere in Asia.

I am hopeful that we have the luxury in Australia that if we are not happy with our lives, we've got lots of other options. We've got a whole massive continent, a whole massive region, where we could live basically anywhere on a tiny little bit of our savings and start again, and if we don't like it, we can go somewhere else. I think if you take a journey like that, bad stuff is, of course, likely to happen, but there's something hopeful and exciting about that.

Down and Out in Paradise by Luke Williams (Echo $29.99) available at good bookstores everywhere or online at echopublishing.com.au/titles/down-and-out-in-paradise

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OPINION

LIFE OF THE PARTY BUS

WHY I'M GLAD THOSE HEADY DAYS EMCEEING A PARTY BUS ARE WELL BEHIND ME.
BY DANIEL BURT.

HOSPITALITY is a muscle that needs exercise lest it becomes weak. It's also a muscle I pulled when, for a brief stint, I was an emcee for party busses. A friend told me about a fleet of busses that needed entertainers who would be happy to be paid in petrol money, performing experience and drink cards. I had been a passenger before and knew the business model well: pick up a group of drunk people from a house, they drink on the way to a nightclub, return to the bus, drink on the way to the next nightclub, and so on and so forth, until each individual brain cell on board shrivels up and dies like a beached carp on the Murray-Darling.

A popular drinking game was one where if you're not drinking, you lose. And have to drink. Supposing the driver became lost and accidentally launched everybody over a cliff, the livers would still be the most damaged organs on the bus. To this day, I don't know whether party busses attract those inclined to feral behaviour or if people merely turn feral on a party bus. It's one of those chicken or the keg type of questions.

Another qualification is that I wasn't judgy. What is responsible drinking, anyway? It's the sort of pious, uppity term begging to be rebelled against. Responsibility is the necessary weight most of us shirk at the nearest opportunity; responsibility drives us to and affords the drink. For working people, drawing a line under a week of drudgery, alcohol is an imagination enabler. I drink, therefore I can. So I called up and after an initial police check – which involved the owner checking I wasn't the police – I accepted the gig.

A POPULAR DRINKING GAME WAS WHERE IF YOU'RE NOT DRINKING, YOU LOSE. AND HAVE TO DRINK.

Before a job, I would make my way to a usually far flung suburb and introduce myself to the bus driver already stationed outside the revellers' house. On board, I would inspect my sack of items – vibrators, penis straws, wigs and other assorted toys – and then head inside to corral the guests onto the bus. This involved, I was to learn, a concerted interest in the status of people's bladders and bowels. The journey into the city sometimes being over an hour, I would ask people if they needed to use the toilet in the same way a first responder might ask a concussion victim how many fingers she's holding up. With the house empty, and Eskies full, it was time to keep the debauchery on schedule. But first, I had to get to know the passengers.

In preparation for the journey, the best friend was invited to fill out a questionnaire providing details on an array of invasive topics so that I was better able to roast the person whom we were there to celebrate. "When did they lose their virginity?" "What's their most embarrassing moment?" "What's a secret they wouldn't want anyone else to know?" The friends responded as though they were under oath. No incriminating biographical detail was spared, sometimes extra pages being used to furnish me with the full incriminating gist. Tales of cheating or criminality or teacher crushes (some acted on) were common, with one bride-to-be on a hen's night relishing the opportunity to have me announce her pregnancy. The confessional atmosphere on the ride in had the effect of giving all those present a clean slate, all the better to be dirtied later in the evening.

My hosting roles were mostly hen's nights, one of the few instances on a Saturday night when being sexually non-threatening is an advantage. A game that emcees used to help break the ice and generate memories involved – and I stress I was under contractual obligation – handing out textas to the women, who were encouraged to go into nightclubs and collect signatures on their bodies from strangers. The value of a signature would depend on where on the body it was written. A leg or arm was worth one point, the torso was 10, then 20 points for a breast and 50 for a signature on or near the genitals. It was difficult not to speculate about long term relationships forged under such conditions: "Dad, how did you meet mum?" "Well, it's a tale of passion and romance, but the short version is I wrote my phone number on her pubis. I reckon she was impressed by how I put it upside down so she could read it". At the end of the night, it was up to me to tally all the signatures and give corresponding prizes. I never expect to again hand out cheap vibrators with an encouraging, "Congratulations; go fuck yourself."

Wrangling my VIPs into venues was simple enough, but it's another task entirely to find and assist girls down from dancing on the bar or asking them to scull their vodka slushy in order to make it to the next nightclub. Outside, we would often come into contact with the related fiancé's bachelor party, the result being on-board cross-pollination. A jingle I came to learn was popular among guys who would squeeze through a window and chant to women on the street, "Tits out/For the boys/Tits out for the boys". What's peculiar is how often it worked. Perhaps reassured by the request coming from behind glass of a moving vehicle, women gleefully obliged in what was effectively a rain dance for boobs. In a marker from the wild, some of them even had signatures.

During one drive to the first nightclub, the hen approached me to explain that she was busting and to ask if we could pull over.

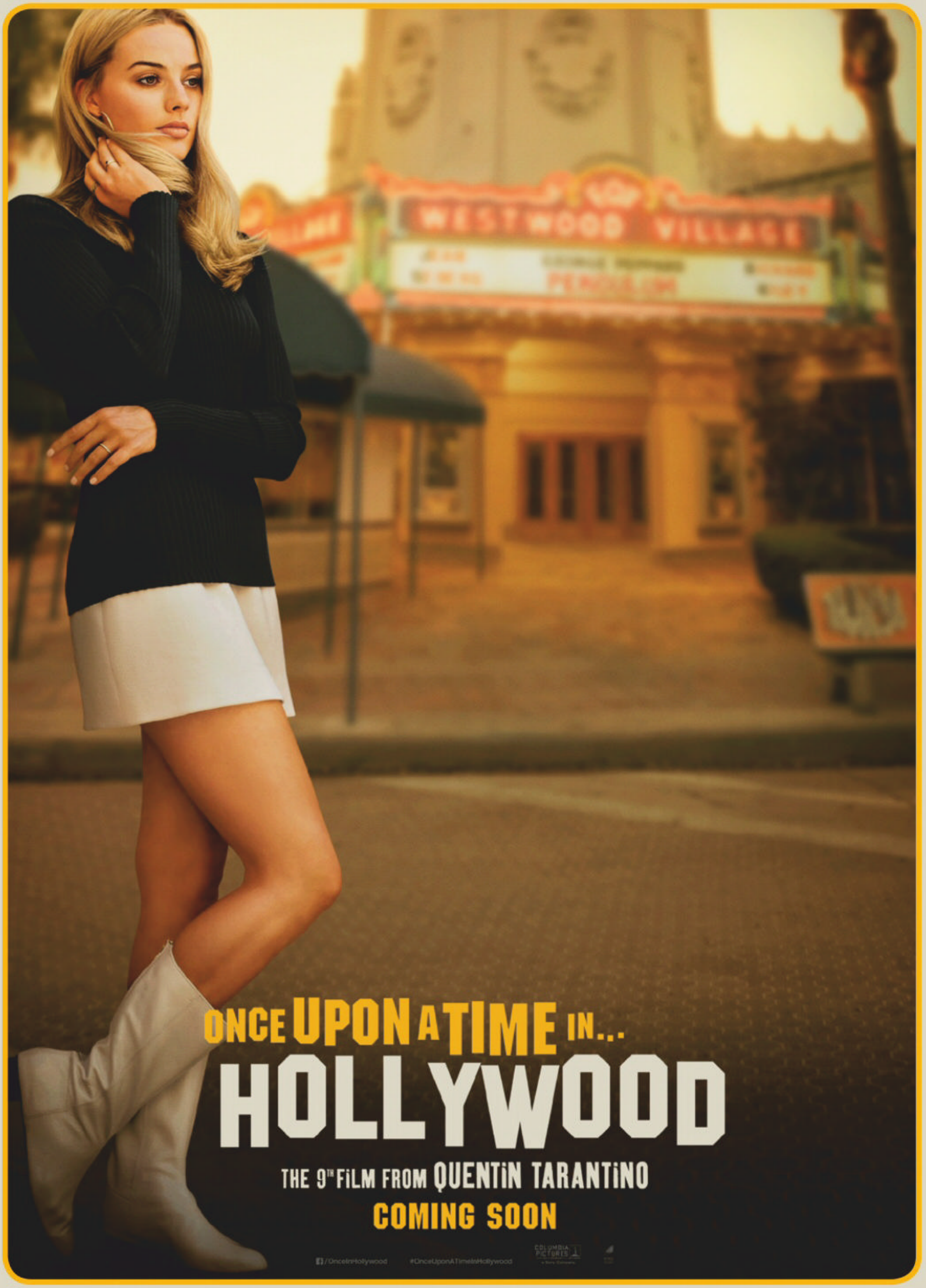
PIECING TOGETHER THE INFORMATION, AN EMPLOYEE AT THE ESTABLISHMENT HAD ENTERED THE WOMEN'S BATHROOM AND ATTEMPTED TO ASSAULT ONE OF THE GIRLS.

At that point, we were running behind schedule, so I promised that we weren't far from the venue and relief would come soon. She informed me that if we didn't stop she would scratch my eyes out, and so the driver by some miracle found a roadside restroom. The whole bus disembarked for the toilet stop and bonus cigarette, and a few minutes later we were back on our way. Seeing the hen still restless, I asked if she was OK and she told me that no, she wasn't. It turned out she didn't use the bathroom, insisting, "I hate public toilets – it was unhygienic".

Soon after, I looked to the back of the bus, and there she was in her fake tiara and sash that said "Future Trophy Wife", squatting over a rubbish bin. The bus then turned a corner and the bin tipped over. Pandemonium ensued as handbags were quickly lifted to avoid further drenching. When we approached a roundabout, the fetid bin juice swished and pooled in alternating corners of the bus, passengers screaming like children at the beach running from the tide.

On what turned out to be my last shift, while I was redeeming drink cards and my passengers in the next room watched a strip show, a girl from my bus came up to me in a panic. Piecing together the information, an employee at the establishment had entered the women's bathroom and attempted to assault one of the girls. I notified security staff, who coolly told me that he "didn't see nothin'". I ushered my group outside and called the police, who said they were on their way. Then I contacted my boss, who said, "Whatever you do, don't call the police". He instructed me to keep the mood light and make sure everyone continued to have a good time, a tall order when your hen's night has turned into a crime scene. Nevertheless, stranded on the footpath, I tried my best to entertain and keep the party occupied as the hen and her friends took turns to peel away and give witness statements inside a portable police station parked nearby. Despite the night being ruined, the girls were in good spirits and I reached into my bag to give the hen a prize that might take her mind off the fact that her special night ended up with a man being charged. Unfortunately, the lucky dip backfired when I presented her with a commemorative pair of handcuffs.

Now when I see a party bus stopped at the traffic lights outside my window, I say a quiet prayer of relief that those days are behind me. Sometimes the passengers stare back and holler, and out of a sense of nostalgia, I unbutton my pyjamas and press my nipples against the glass. You know, for the boys.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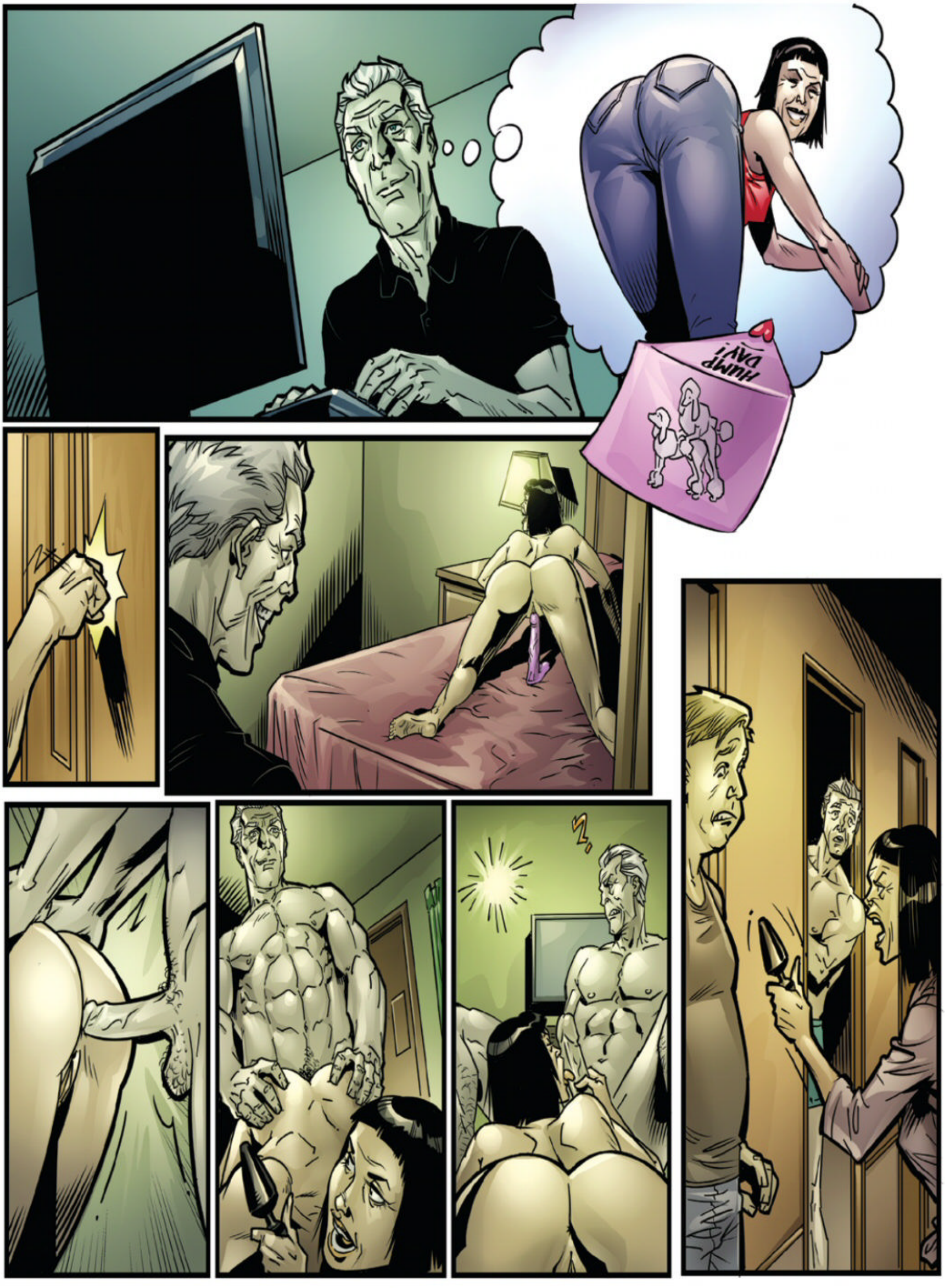

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PENTHOUSE FORUM

THE DEPARTMENT THAT SHOWCASES THE BEST OF THE WORST LETTERS RECEIVED FROM PENTHOUSE FORUM.

Dear Penthouse,

After over five decades on the planet, I finally gave in and joined an online dating site. What the fuck took me so long, seriously? Photos, bios, insights into favorite positions...looking for a relationship, looking for a good time.... Man, I feel like I slept through the revolution.

I'm an ass man. Big time. Love the butt stuff. I want knees to buckle as I massage that G spot from the inside. And this over-50 dating site was a lifesaver. Do you know how awkward it is to talk about this fetish with a woman I just met at a bar...or at church?

Her name was Kate. Perky tits, tiny waist, heart-shaped ass, jet black hair, and she totally got me laughing with a dirty little love note—sent via fucking snail mail—with a picture of two miniature poodles humping, and two words on the back: Hump Day. I was a little surprised because her profile made her seem so conservative, but she had this sexy twinkle in her hazel eyes that just screamed, "Lick a shot of tequila off my belly and fuck me sideways till we pass out!"

The note had directions to meet at this little hotel, right outside town. I knocked on the door. "Get in here!" she yelled. And there she was, on all fours, her butt in the air, vibrator humming on her juiced-up clit. My dick got rock-hard in three seconds.

"Lube up and climb aboard, Sailor." Um, aye aye, Captain?

I was so frickin' horny as I slid off my pants, lubed up, and eased my cock inside her tiny puckered asshole. Yes, this was happening.

Her ass cheeks were soft, yet firm. The jiggle was rhythmic. I reached around and pinched her plump, raspberry nipples until they were hot to the touch.

"Fuck my ass," she said, "Fuck it hard. Slam that cock as deep as it goes. I can take all of it."

I sunk my sausage to the base—farther in than ever before. And it felt so right. I was getting close and she knew it. She clenched up and it slowed everything down for me.

"Goddamnit, Kate, what are you doing to me?"

She said, "I brought a plug and I want to shove it in your ass. You game?"

Hell, yeah, I was game. She shimmied off my dick and grabbed a butt plug from under the white pillow. Thankfully it was a small one, but at this point I'd do anything for her. She had me.

She massaged my balls, licking my dick so sweetly, and popped a finger into my ass to get me ready. Then we heard the TV go on in the room adjacent to ours. Football blaring. Then there was yelling. Yelling above the TV. The wall was paper-thin, and this dude was obviously not happy with the Browns (pun seriously not intended—it actually was the Browns game). Total boner-killer.

"Wait just a minute. I'm going to get them to shut the fuck up," Kate said. She put on a robe and headed for the door. I chased after her, but it was too late.

Out in the hallway I saw her standing there, shaking the greased butt plug in the startled face next door, shouting, "Turn that goddamn TV down!"

Game definitely over.

—Rory B., Cleveland Heights, Ohio

FLASHBACK

JONESTOWN ISSUE

May 1981

TRIPLE DISTILLED
VODKA

WILD ROSE
GIN

BARREL AGED
VODKA

“Pour it again, Sam”
THE GIN JOINT presents
MELBOURNE MADE
HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU, KID
TRIPLE DISTILLED
VODKA
Clean, smooth, sweet and delicate.
WILD ROSE GIN
Deep floral and citrus flavours with a sweet, smooth finish. Versatile enough to star in a cocktail or be enjoyed straight.
AS TIME GOES BY
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BARREL AGED VODKA
Serve neat, on ice or with soda to grasp its full complexity.

Spirits inspired by the charm and romance of Casablanca.

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